



September 2014



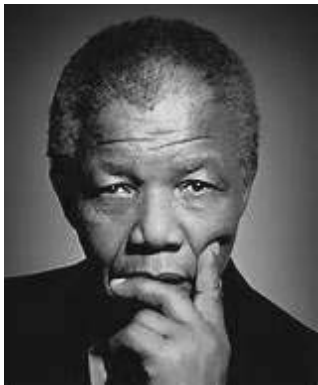
GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

The God Who Does What is Right

By Ron Allen

When the African National Congress formed a government in 1994, many whose struggle against Apartheid had been long and painful were looking for justice, but representatives of the defeated white minority wanted amnesty.

In its determination to hold on to power, the former government had committed gross human rights violations. Horrible crimes were perpetrated against an oppressed and restive majority indigenous population. Their sufferings were extensive. It seemed necessary that the aggrieved and sinned-against be heard; they wanted to tell their stories. Many of the crimes were heinous in the extreme; wrongs that could not simply be passed over. They needed to be righted.



Nelson Mandela and his government knew that justice, predominantly in the form of retribution, would take a very long time. He also knew that years of requital would perpetuate hatreds. On the other hand, to issue a blanket absolution would send a message that the tyrannies and inhumanities endured by so many victims were of little consequence.

So the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in order to “reject a protracted avenging” as well as a “shallow and indulgent reprieve.”

The hearings focussed on the victims. Over 22,000 statements were given. Listening to them was frequently excruciating, but the whole country and the world had an opportunity to become aware of the severity and scale of the wrong that had been done.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not accepted by everyone in South Africa. Top echelons in the military refused to cooperate. However, many foot soldiers who had done their bidding appealed for amnesty. Seven thousand amnesty applications were lodged and fifteen hundred were granted. One testimony among the thousands from the TRC illustrates how the Commission worked to bring healing. An incident of state terrorism involving a group of people,

later called the “Craddock 4” were ambushed in their car by the police and murdered in grisly fashion before the car was burned. The teen-age daughter of one of the victims testified: “We would like to forgive, but we would just like to know who the persons are who did it so we can forgive them. We still don’t know who to forgive?”

The TRC was not a perfect tribunal; far from it. Not every evil-doer was called to account. Not every wronged individual obtained justice. Moreover, mercy was neither precisely nor exhaustively distributed. Despite its manifest shortcomings, the TRC went a considerable way toward judging evil and laying down a basis for reconciliation. It was an attempt to establish ‘righteousness’ in South Africa. Mr. Mandela and those who shared his wisdom knew that “*Righteousness exalts a nation*” (Proverbs 14:34) “*The fruit of righteousness is peace*” (Isaiah 32:17).

In his letter to the Romans, Paul contends that the gospel of Jesus reveals the righteousness of God that cannot be accommodated to evil. The momentum of divinity travels in the opposite direction to wickedness. Therefore, judgment is necessarily an element of what the gospel reveals.

According to Paul, God’s righteousness stands over against persons who are unashamedly evil. It is opposed to those who do not wish to be known as evil, and pretend they are not. It is against them who devise codes of decency and propriety and legislate to restrain ‘antisocial’ behavior. Furthermore, God’s righteousness is against promoters of religious laws, and those who position themselves within moral enclosures, thinking that they are thereby exempt from judgment and think they are ‘in the right.’

No matter how elaborate conventions and etiquettes become in the hands of moralists and religionists, they remain mere appliances with which to prosecute and extend an underlying refusal of God’s way.

The nearest-to-hand example of this, for Paul, is his own people, the Jews. Though they take pride in their law, they are a living exhibit of the fact that no one can ever make themselves right with God. The glaring truth is: when it comes to the only moral benchmark that matters, no one is righteous; not even one (Romans 3:10).

Continued on Next Page

CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE

www.goodnewsunlimited.org

EDITORIAL . . .



Pastor Ron Allen

“These men are Jews and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice” (Acts 16:20, 21).

This accusation was brought against two Christians—Paul and Silas—by the owners of a Philippian slave-girl. Under the influence of a ‘python spirit,’ she generated income for her masters by means of her clairvoyant powers. She followed Paul and Silas around the city, harassing and hindering them in their missionary work. Finally, Paul, in the name of Jesus, commanded the python spirit to leave the girl. Immediately, she was freed from her spiritual bondage and her paranormal gift vanished.

Slaves had no right of self-determination. She was property in the same sense as cows or donkeys. She had no personal worth; only an economic value, and that was now diminished. Here was the *real* reason Paul and Silas were accused before the magistrate. A capital loss by that of the girl’s owners mattered more than any offense against custom. Aware that an action most likely to succeed was one that appealed to prejudice, the slave owners of success brought the missionaries race and religion to the attention of the court.

“These men are not like us; they are trying to change the way we live; they are a threat to our way—the law of Rome, the greatest way there is.” This was the intent of the slave owners—and it worked. Arguments that are not dissimilar are advanced in our time, in society and in international affairs. Often they express the will for an advantage to be preserved, even if that advantage rests on the chronic disadvantage of other individuals or groups.


Western societies, such as our own, have high per capita expenditures on gambling. The social damage is well

documented. Marriages collapse under gambling led pressures, family residences are sold to pay debt, and children are rendered homeless, broken and ashamed adults find their way to into alcoholism, prison, and/or care centers.

Courageous people in legislatures strive for more stringent regulatory measures against gambling, but they are frequently stymied by gaming interests who complain that ‘it ought to be the natural right of any man in this country to bet if he wishes to.’

Whenever the catch-cry is, ‘our way,’ ‘our custom,’ ‘our law,’ there are plenty ready to join in the chorus. It was so in Philippi. A crowd mushroomed in support of the slave-girl’s masters. Local political figures were easily persuaded to yield to the chauvinism of the mob. As Christ’s agents, cooperating with him in the liberation of an ill-used woman, the two Christians ran headlong into Roman law; a law no less revered by Roman citizens, than that of Jews and their law.

As preachers of the gospel, Paul and Silas brought a message of ‘liberty for the captives,’ hope, peace and human dignity, but these were unwelcome conceptions according to Roman law. Lack of fellow-feeling was cloaked in a call for respect of law and order. By means of this moralistic sleight-of-hand, compassion was held in contempt, love was deemed uncivil, unpatriotic. Zeal for law was preferred before human freedom.

Law—all law, whether civil or religious—has serious deficiencies. Men and women without anything higher with which to govern themselves or their communities, will certainly, in one way or another, oppress their fellow men and women. A better benchmark for human conduct is Jesus and his surpassing love for all mankind. 

Continued from previous page

Yes, God is a father who pities his children. God is a mother who cannot forget the child she has carried in her womb and nursed at her breast. Like the best parents, God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger...forgiving wickedness (Exodus 34:7). How can God be a just judge and a forgiver at the same time? If the former is all he can be, then nothing and no one will be left after he had finished judging. If he is only

the latter, then he will be the sponsor of bedlam. It is a matter of ultimate importance that God do right.

When I was in the fifth grade, my teacher was trying hard to teach mathematics. I hated mathematics. So did my friend who shared the same wooden bench with me. The teacher set a math problem on the board for us to solve. My friend conferred with me in whispers: “Let’s not do it.” We agreed and sat there doodling. The teacher came walking down the →

GOODNEWS *Unlimited*

Good News Unlimited magazine is published every month by Good News Unlimited, P.O. Box 6687, Auburn, CA, USA 95604-6687.

Good News Unlimited is an interdenominational Christian organization proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ and his kingdom of grace. Special emphasis is placed on the message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ’s righteousness alone. GNU also links the gospel to the needs of the whole person, to life-style, and preventive medicine.

Good News Unlimited magazine also seeks to keep readers up-to-date on all aspects of GNU’s ministries. This includes news on national and international radio broadcasts; public seminars, congresses, and Bible schools within the USA (as well as

public meetings in Canada and overseas); and the dissemination of literature, audio and video material. (A comprehensive catalog is available free on request.)

Good News Unlimited is a nonprofit religious corporation supported solely by donations from those who believe in its ministries. Gifts are tax deductible in the USA and Canada. An annual review of GNU’s accounts is made by an external auditor. All regular donors to GNU may receive a financial statement on request.

Good News Unlimited is reached by phone at 530.823.9690. Fax 530.823.5338. E-mail gnu@goodnewsunlimited.org.

This magazine is free upon request.

September, 2014
Vol. 33, No. 9

Published by Good News Unlimited

Copyright © 2014

Editor

Ron Allen

Graphic Designer

Debbie O’Brien

Proofreader

Philip Rhodes

Molly Jordan

OVERSEAS ADDRESSES:

Australian office:

P.O. Box 6788
Tweed Heads Sth
NSW 2486, Australia

Canadian offices:

P.O. Box 537
Abbotsford, BC V2S 5Z5
Canada

222 Olive Avenue
Willowdale, ON M2N 4P6
Canada

aisle between the benches. He was looking over shoulders to see how his pupils were progressing with their work. He came to where I was—doodling! He didn't seem to see it. Then he passed to my friend and looked at his book. He had doodling too—and the teacher saw it all. He took my friend by the collar and made him stand near the blackboard, bawling him out in fearful tones.

My friend looked distressed. His eyes found mine and I read what they said to me. They said: “You should be out here getting into trouble just like me.” I looked back at him with a face that said: “Yes, I know, but I'm staying here for as long as my luck holds.”

I can tell you I was in dread that at any moment justice would catch up with me. I also realized my friendship with my class-mate was under great strain.

Where judgment is applied inappropriately, and mercy is distributed in an ad hoc way, anger and social chaos lie at the door. For the universe to be a safe and peaceful place, God must be right, and all his creatures must be confident that he is right. How he can be right and be merciful to us who are so often wrong, is a problem worthy of God.

The good news is God has resolved the conundrum. He has acknowledged its reality by addressing it head-on.

Romans 3:24-26 says that he sent Jesus for the express purpose of demonstrating his righteousness. How was this achieved? God presented him as a “*sacrifice of atonement*” (Romans 3:25). Paul uses a word from the Jewish temple ritual. It is a word that is sometimes translated *mercy seat* or *atonement cover*. Sacrificial blood was taken into the sanctuary and applied to the top of the ark that was the atonement cover, the mercy seat. Blood put there was said to be *presented* to the Lord. It was the means whereby the transgressions of the people were blotted out. In Romans 3, Jesus is the mercy seat.

The text speaks of Jesus' blood, so it is clear that his being the mercy seat has something to do with his death. What did the death of Jesus have to do with transgressions? Verse 25 tells us that God *presented* Jesus to demonstrate his righteousness *at the present time*, because *before*—before Jesus' death—God had left sin unpunished.

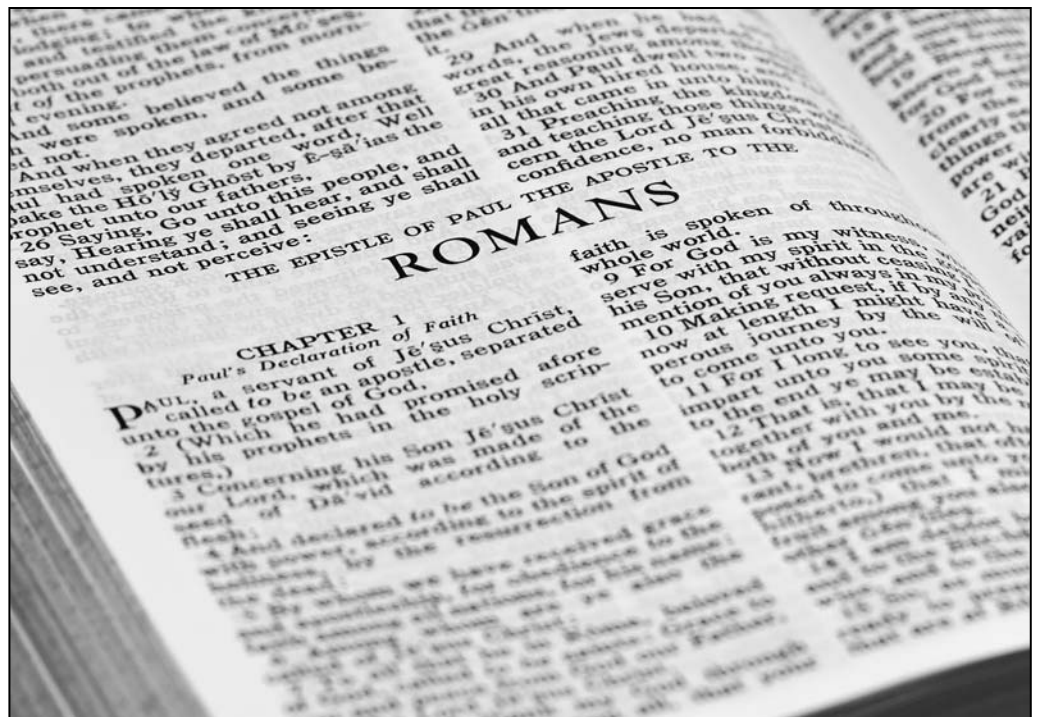
Paul seems to be saying that, before Calvary, there was a backlog of badness that had not been brought to justice. The righteous judgment of God had not been applied to it; and because that was so, there was room for someone to say: “God is not just; people do terrible things and get away with it.” But now, since Jesus has been presented as a sacrifice of atonement, God has removed the ground for that accusation.

He has judged evil. He judged it in the death of his Son, Jesus.

Here, we briefly pause to emphasize the singular nature of the ONE who God presented as a sacrifice of atonement for sin. It is Jesus who is Messiah, Christ. As Messiah and king he represents his people. What is true of him is true of them. He embodies them; they are included in him. The divine judgment of wickedness falls on him, and he is thus wounded for *their* transgressions.

Jesus not only incorporates his people as their human king, he is also God's son. God has powerfully declared him such by raising him from the dead. When he presented his Son as a place of atonement and mercy, God suffered in his Son.

In the death of Jesus, God directed against himself the full purchase of his own judgment upon evil. God let fall on himself his own abhorrence of human mischief, vice, villainy,



unfaithfulness—every form of human depravity. Who can possibly know what tremors, what anguish, what wrenching, what convulsions of sorrow and remorse went coursing through God when this happened! God judged; God suffered—in Jesus. And he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquity. Our sin has been judged. Our debt is paid.

Whereas before Jesus' death, the judgment of God was just in condemning all mankind, now, God is equally just in awarding a verdict of righteousness to all who put their faith in Jesus.

In Romans, the words, *righteous, righteousness, just, justice, justify and justified* are all variants from the same word family. The righteousness revealed in the Gospel is God's intrinsic rightness. It is the righteousness that he was literally at pains to demonstrate when he presented Jesus at Calvary. That same righteousness required God to act against evil.

Continued on the next page

Word From the Well: *Sharing Living Water in the 21st Century*

A church I know committed itself to fixing up a dilapidated inner-city school. Government funding in their region had been drastically cut, and this church appropriately saw this as a



marvelous kingdom opportunity. As they planned for and prayed about this project, word seeped out, and they began getting calls from local businesses and neighbors who wanted to help in the project, for kingdom beauty always attracts good-hearted people. Thousands upon thousands of dollars worth of food and materials for the workers were donated, and dozens of people from businesses and the surrounding neighborhood ended up joining the church in its work. With hundreds of people sacrificing time and energy, it took only ten hours for this school to undergo an “extreme makeover.”

The kids who attended the school, the teachers who taught there, and the neighbors and businesses that participated or witnessed this renovation were deeply impacted. A fragmented, economically disadvantaged community was drawn together, resulting in a school building they could all take pride in. A long-term relationship developed between this school and the church, with people from the church volunteering in and praying for the school on a regular basis. Even more

fundamentally, people saw Calvary-quality love in action and some of them began to wonder, “Why would these people do this for us?” This is the question the church ought to be continually raising in people’s minds by its radical service to the world.

Not only this, but the action caught the attention of certain people in the government. The beauty of this act called public attention to an ugly aspect of the region’s social and political structure and forced the question: Why is there significant disparity between the conditions of and resources available to predominantly white suburban schools, on the one hand, and predominantly nonwhite, inner-city schools on the other? It poignantly raised the question of whether the officials who made the decision to cut funding in the first place really understood the negative impact their decision would make on these already disadvantaged students. The pressure put on government when the church lives in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, must not be minimized.

-Gregory Boyd: THE MYTH OF A CHRISTIAN NATION. pp. 122, 123.



Continued from previous page

Without exception, men and women have not, and do not, live just lives according to the measure of the righteousness of God. They are on that account judgment bound. To be righteous, God must judge them.

He has done so! The iniquity of the whole world went to judgment when God’s Son endured the wrath of God against all wickedness and ungodliness. God did this so he could show mercy; so that he could justify—that is, so that he could declare men and women righteous—and still be righteous himself.

Often on our TV screens there are news reports of parents, perhaps of a teenager killed in a senseless act of violence. The perpetrator has his day in court and the judge hands down a

light or even a suspended sentence. Reporters gather to ask the parents, “What is your reaction to the verdict?” Of course they are distraught, outraged because the punishment trivializes the crime. “The verdict is unworthy of our son; unworthy of the justice system; unworthy of the judge.”

In justifying normal everyday sinners (like ourselves), God has provided no cheap and easy clemency. He has wrought an amazing forgiveness, which is utterly worthy of himself. In pardoning the guilty, God is every whit righteous in doing so. Though it is forgiveness, it is more than forgiveness. Forgiveness says, “You can go, I’ll let you off this time,” but when God justifies, it is not “you may go,” it is, “you are welcome.” As surely as God is right, you are ‘in the right.’ Your rightness is the righteousness of God! 