



September 2016

FREE!

GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

The Reverse Psychology of God

By Ron Allen

There's a kind of reverse psychology called *'reactance theory.'* A man feels his freedom or self-determination is under threat, so he is likely to do the complete opposite to that which he is being asked to do.

Pennebaker and Sanders, two 1970's researchers, experimented with signs that forbade boys to write on toilet walls. One sign read: DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WRITE ON THIS WALL. Another sign said: PLEASE DO NOT WRITE ON THIS WALL. At the end of the experiment, the sign explicitly prohibiting writing on the toilet wall—had the most writing on it.

Parents acquire an instinct for reverse psychology. They learn to elicit desirable behavior from their offspring, sometimes, by appearing to make an undesirable behavior 'off limits.' An ignorant bystander might easily misunderstand the design of such a parent. He might think: 'Those parents care nothing for that child.'

When Paul penned his letter to the Christians at Rome, it was a time of great change. The tectonic plates of civilization, which had remained fixed for hundreds of years, were on the move. The religious and cultural landscape was being re-shaped; to some it was becoming unrecognizable. Christ had come, and things could never be the same again.

The Chosen People, by a large majority, had rejected their Messiah. On the other hand, nations long beheld as reprehensible and shameless, without God and without hope in the world, were, in large numbers, rejoicing in God's mercy. For generations Israel had viewed nations on their borders as fit only for destruction; as storing up for themselves the wrath of God. They expected Messiah to come and thresh the nations; gather his wheat (Israel) into his garner, and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Look now! Those who are not God's people are flooding into the Messianic community, while the historic 'elect' are now, for the most part, rejected. What had become of the covenant God made? What about the promise that Israel would "rule over the nations" (Isaiah 14:2)? What of the assurance that the Lord would visit his people and "lay bare his holy arm in the sight of the nations so that the earth would see the salvation of the Lord" (Isaiah 52:10)?

Israelite men and women who believe in Jesus now wonder if God has abandoned their unbelieving countrymen; whether

he has broken the promises he made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

If Jews are confused, Gentiles, freshly introduced to the mercies of God may be feeling confident in their new-found

privileges. Some may think they have God figured out in a way that Jewish people before them did not. They may be quite certain that God has rejected Israel for the crime of crucifying Jesus of Nazareth. They may believe that God has given up those whom he formerly chose, but now *they* sit at the center of God's purpose.

To both Jews and Gentiles who think such things, Paul argues it's not like that

at all. "Salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious" (Romans 11:11). "Israel's loss will mean riches for the world" (Romans 11:12). It is Paul's view that God does not give up on anyone. By means of something that looks like reverse psychology, what Israel once had is now enjoyed by others—not to the end that Israel should be forever shut out, but in order that she thirst for the blessing God always intended for her.

God chooses individuals and/or groups for different roles at various times in the course of history. His choosing is imperial. So, "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated" (Romans 9:13). Some he calls

"children of promise"; others are called "the natural children" (Romans 9:8). Out of the same lump of clay God makes some pots for "noble use" and some for "common purposes" (Romans 9:21). God chooses to reveal his "kindness to some, and his sternness to others" (Romans 11:22).

No matter to what role a person or group is appointed in God's aims; it has nothing to do with their relative merits. Each is incorporated into an overarching design in which their destinies are indissolubly linked to one another. It comes about, then, that sometimes the 'elect' change roles with the 'rejected.'

Continued on next page



CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE

www.goodnewsunlimited.org

EDITORIAL . . .



Pastor Ron Allen

“Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it” (Mark 15:23).

In Bible times it was customary to offer an opiate to an extreme sufferer (see Proverbs 31:6, 7). The blessed benefits of modern drugs were not available, but some substances were well-known for their stupefying effect and this is what Jesus was offered.

It is likely that those who offered Jesus this form of relief were surprised to see that he did not take the wine vinegar potion. Why did he refuse it? It was probably not because he wanted to be a teetotaler to the last. Would it not have been to his advantage to smooth the pain just a little? I am not certain of the answer, but let us now surmise.


The Gospels and the rest of the New Testament set forth Jesus' death as the crowning achievement of his life. The utter beauty of his humanity came into its full glory in his *“obedience unto death; even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:8). Calvary was the high water mark of Jesus' career of service. Through it, he acted out the words he used to describe his mission: *“For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45). In death, Jesus reached the climactic moment in all that he had come to do. When he told his disciples that ‘his’ meat and drink was to do the will of his father and to finish his work, Calvary was what he was looking to.

Perhaps it was because he was at the supreme moment of his existence that Jesus refused to dull his faculties. If what was occurring was nothing more than the cruel death of another

ordinary man (albeit an exceptionally innocent one), inflicted by corrupt people, then it would not have mattered. He might have hoarsely mouthed the words, “Give me the narcotic, and plenty of it; my pain is more than I can bear.” But this is exactly what he would *not* do and we can only guess that he was struggling to accomplish something which would have been at risk if he had allowed himself to be sedated.

A related reason for Jesus refusing pain-killing assistance at the moment of extreme duress may lie in his determination to own his own death. He had informed his disciples that he intended to lay down his life as the loving shepherd of his sheep. *“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord”* (John 10:18). In the temple ritual, animals were sacrificed but they did not offer themselves. They were brought to the altar against their will. Jesus' death was more excellent because it was a self offering. *“I come to do thy will”* (Hebrews 10:7). If Jesus was slightly drugged at the critical moment, he would have, at least in part, relinquished control of his death and thereby sullied its perfection.

Jesus may also have declined the wine vinegar because he was thinking of all the sufferers who never get any relief. Pain lies heavy upon the world. Jesus is the brother of every sufferer. He is *“touched with the feelings of our infirmities.”* He endured so that no one could ever truthfully say that ‘God doesn't understand my pain.’

By managing his dying the way he did, Jesus re-enacted the love God showed to his people in the desert: *“In all their distress, he too was distressed”* (Isaiah 63:9). 

Continued from previous page

To document this idea from Scripture, Paul refers his readers to God's choosing of Abraham—with a view to blessing *“all the families of the earth”* (Genesis 12:1-3). Further, God hardens Pharaoh's heart. Why? To *“display my power in you and that my name might be published in all the earth”* (Romans 9:17 see also Exodus 9:16). When Israel rebelled against Moses in the desert, God said: *“I rejected them... They angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people”* (Deuteronomy 32:19-21). See also Isaiah 65:1; Romans 10:21.

Interpreting the events of his day, Paul says that *elect* Israel has become *hardened*; with the effect that the Gentiles are now finding mercy (Romans 11:25). Moreover, Gentiles are being

chosen for mercy in order that *hardened* Israel intensely desire what used to be theirs, but which Gentiles now rejoice in (Romans 11:11-14).

Jewish and Gentile destinies are intertwined. God elects Jews to bless the Gentiles. He hardens some with a similar end in view, and gathers the Gentiles into his family with a view to the salvation of Israel. All God's sovereign appointments have the same end in view for all parties. *“He has bound all men over to disobedience in order to have mercy on all”* (Romans 11:32).

It is apparent, therefore, that Paul's use of such words as *rejection, hardening, common usage, objects of wrath, not my people*, all of which designate subjects of God's choosing, is not meant to indicate God's final will for any of them. None of →

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. E-mail gnu@goodnewsunlimited.org.

This magazine is free upon request.

September 2016
Vol. 35, No. 9

Published by Good News Unlimited

Copyright © 2016

Editor

Pastor Ron Allen

Graphic Designer

Debbie O'Brien

Proofreader

Philip Rhodes

Molly Claydon

AFFILIATE ADDRESSES:

Canadian office:
222 Olive Avenue
Willowdale, ON M2N 4P6
Canada

the subjects are beyond recovery. At all times they remain a target of God's merciful ambition.

We who inhabit the Western Hemisphere have a long history of privilege in the favor of God. We inherited the Judeo-Christian worldview which gave us a platform for progress in science and the humanities. For hundreds of years our governments and their institutions, the judiciary, our notions of freedom and human rights have been informed and helped by the refining pull of Christ and his gospel. We have flourished spiritually, intellectually, and materially. The promise, "*The Lord will make you the head and not the tail*" (*Deuteronomy 28:13*), has come true for Europe, North America and the British Commonwealth.

Things have started to change; a great shift—like the one that emerged in New Testament times—is under way. Now, the larger proportion of those who respond positively to the gospel are not from our part of the world. They are in regions that we have labeled 'dark.' Africa, Latin America; countries we thought of as 'godless places such as Russia and China. Now, in these lands, people are turning to God without first becoming like us.

Within our own culture there is spreading disillusionment with Christianity as it has been taught and lived. Where accessions to the faith are occurring, they frequently do so aside from the Church's familiar forms and structures. Generation Y—those born through the 80's and 90's—have, in large measure, rejected religion as practiced by their parents. Having by-passed mainstream faith institutions, they become Christ's disciples without seeing the inside of our beautiful houses of worship with their magnificent facades and plush interiors. Away from religion's politics and recruitment-driven agendas, they learn to love and serve Jesus.

They are found by him in basement rooms, drop-in centers and coffee houses among people not dressed in their 'Sunday best'; inked people, and pierced people who might seem out of place in many traditional worship contexts; people who would not be tolerated there anyhow.

God is choosing for himself, folk whom we probably would not choose. He is gathering into his family undervalued, overlooked, discarded people, who have been crushed in a society obsessed with money, power and physical beauty—values, by the way, which have been largely embraced by the Western Church.

Yes, in our time, men and women are entering the faith community of God. With gladness they are drinking at the wells of his salvation. This is happening, even as those who were before them stewards of the mysteries of God, are being passed by. Their churches are growing empty. The glory is departed.

In cities of the developed world stand large churches, whose few remaining stalwarts ask: Has God's promise failed? We trusted that he would have ended this evil age by now, and taken us, his people, to his home. We thought he would have brought the wicked to judgment before this. Why has he instead welcomed so many of them into his favor and given them the gift of his Spirit?

We need to look at the present situation through gospel eyes.



If we are among those having enjoyed long experience of God's grace, we ought not to be dismissive of unbelievers—even grossly immoral ones. God's purposes are being brought to fruition in them as well as in us. They advertise the fact that God is slow to anger, and willing to forgive. Though they mock God and rage against him, they remain, despite themselves, exhibits of God's determination that not one should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

God has appointed the ungodly for this role, so that they are foils for his kindness; signs that his love is immeasurable and eternal. If the elect were to hold the wicked in contempt, they would despise their own privilege. We cannot disassociate ourselves from our heathen neighbors. God is working in them to do us good.

If we are among those who are new to the goodness of God in Jesus, we ought not to look at traditional custodians of that blessing, thinking we are better than them, and that God is finished with them. No. God is using our joy and assurance in the gospel to make them envious. Like the Prodigal son, once they had everything; now they look at us and think: 'Even slaves in the father's house are better off than we are now, and we perish with hunger.' We cannot disassociate ourselves from them. God is working in us to do them good.

It is never a safe policy to assume that we, better than anyone else, know what God is doing in the world in our time. Do we suppose that it has been given to us to know exactly who God's enemies are? Do we think to use whatever resources we have to neutralize them or destroy them?

Some sincere folk are quite certain that God's enemies are liberal politicians, theological liberals, evolutionists, gay activists and the pro-choice people. There are also people of conviction who know for sure that God's enemies are the religious right, the gay-haters and right-to-lifers.

I met a man in the Smoky Mountains who told me, "This is the Garden of Eden, right here." I was inclined to believe him. The Smoky Mountains are beautiful. Later, I was being shown through the Canadian Rockies by a Canadian friend. He told me, "This is God's own country." I couldn't argue with him. Then I remembered the silent grandeur and the haunting splendor of Outback Australia, where I grew up, and I knew they were both wrong!

Human beings are so tribal. We invest so much to advance and defend our nation, our ethnicity, our place, our religion, our ideology. But God is not rusted onto any of us. His dealings with humankind are intrinsically universal. Our privilege can never be excised from someone else's lack thereof. We may *seem* strangers, but humanity is one. Our destinies are interwoven. And if like Paul, we can discern the reverse psychology of God's grace and cooperate with its aims, untold joy awaits.



For A Better World

By George Arthur Frantz

About the time Columbus was looking for a new world, a Chinese philosopher gave a sound suggestion for improving an old one. His name was Wang, and his prescription is this:

“The ancients, who wished to promote illustrious virtue throughout the Empire, first put their own states in good order. Wishing to put their own states in order, they first regulated their own families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first set themselves right. Wishing to set themselves right, they purified their own hearts. Wishing to purify their own hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts.”

That brings us down out of generalities. The world will not be better until we are better people. We shall never have a better century until the hours and days are better. In fact, the better century begins with the next seconds.

Wang of China and White of Emporia agree. “This world is made better by every man improving his own conduct—no reform is accomplished wholesale.”

Conversion is the real reformation. *“Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).*



The church is never a ‘members-only’ club. Isn’t it sad that the church became the gathering of the saved instead of what Jesus makes it in his open table of fellowship? Jesus’ table is the gathering of the unsaved! Sometimes fellow-priests tell me: “We’re preaching to the choir. We’re saving the saved. We just keep gathering the same two hundred people, sing Jesus songs, and read the Bible and we convince one another that we’re saved and that we’re holy.” That’s what happens when the church becomes established in one place, when the people come to the church instead of us going to them. We create the congregation of the ‘enlightened’—who by that very token, are not enlightened at all!

-Richard Rohr: JESUS’ PLAN FOR A NEW WORLD. p. 89.



COME HEAR THE GOOD NEWS

SHARED BY PASTOR RONALD ALLEN

SEPTEMBER 23-24, 2016

WILLOWDALE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

236 AVENUE EAST • NORTH YORK, ONTARIO

CONTACT: DAVID OKAMURA (416) 222-9281

JANE MATTHEWS (416) 759-9064

SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 2, 2016

BANFF FULL GOSPEL CHURCH

405 COUGAR STREET • BANFF, ALBERTA, CANADA

CONTACT: DAN ERICKSON (604) 309-9990

BOOK ROOM RESERVATIONS AND MENTION “GOOD NEWS BOOKING”
AT RED CARPET INN 1-800-563-4609 OR 1-403-762-4184

*PASSPORT REQUIRED FOR TRAVEL TO CANADA