

Good News Unlimited

April, 1985

Solo Christo—Sola Scriptura—Sola Fida—Sola Gratia



Once
Upon
A
Friday
Long
Ago

SUMMER CONGRESS INFORMATION
INSIDE

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Editorial

"Where is your faith?"

The question was put to shame the fears of the disciples. Terrified by the high winds and raging seas, they had panicked. "Save, Lord; we are perishing!" Rising from a sound sleep, Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves, "Peace! Be still!" A great calm followed.

Recently as I read this story, I heard God ask me personally, "Brad, where is your faith?" I had come to the Scriptures that day discouraged. In fact, I didn't even feel like reading the Bible at all. For a while I sat at my desk feeling blue, somewhat paralyzed by the bleak outlook of certain personal affairs. I was staring helplessly at the wind and the waves which were threatening my existence. Jesus seemed asleep in the stern of my life, apathetic about the entire situation. I could not discern the presence or purpose of God in the events around me. It was one of those moments when you wonder if religion isn't really just a psychological game we play, just an illusion we have concocted to numb the harsh realities of life. Is there any substance to faith or is faith merely an escape mechanism?

Still, I went to the Bible that day believing that divine revelation had taken place within human history and that this revelation is recorded for us in Scripture. I trusted that God would speak again as he had in the past. His message to me was straight and clear, "Though present storms buffet you, I have not abandoned you. Though chaos threatens you, I will bring order out of chaos. Though you feel you are perishing, I will save you, for I am faithful."

At times, like the disciples, we are paralyzed by fear, incapacitated by doubt, discouraged by reversals, hurt by failures. We are pained at the loss of a loved one or the death of a dream. Disappointed expectations pop the bubble of our fondest hopes. We may even be disillusioned by the fact that faith in God does not shield us from hard knocks. Then what good is it?

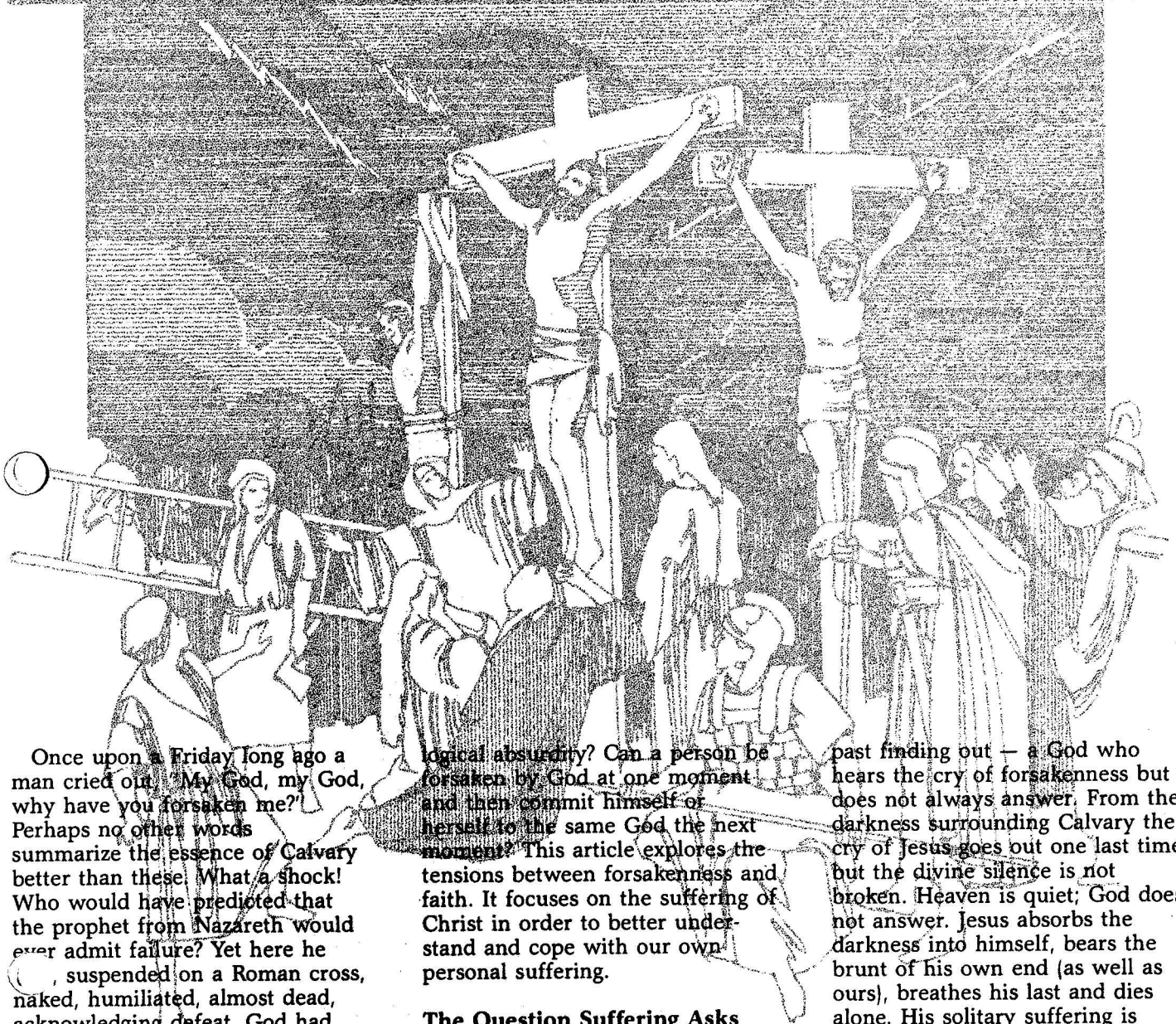
Jesus suffered intensely. His faith did not protect him from a horrible and painful death. Yet from the midst of his suffering he committed himself to God and trusted that suffering would not be the final word. Rather than stare at his misfortune and succumb to a hopeless despair, Jesus chose the path of faith. He chose to believe that behind all the mysterious events of history, including the storms, there is a faithful God who is leading history toward a meaningful end, a God who will bring order out of chaos and resurrection out of death.

"Where is your faith?"

—Brad McIntyre

Once Upon A Friday Long Ago

by Brad McIntyre



Once upon a Friday long ago a man cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Perhaps no other words summarize the essence of Calvary better than these: What a shock! Who would have predicted that the prophet from Nazareth would ever admit failure? Yet here he is, suspended on a Roman cross, naked, humiliated, almost dead, acknowledging defeat. God had forsaken him after all. The cross is a picture of ultimate forsakenness. If one wants to know what it means to be truly alone in the world, without hope and without God, one need only to look at the crucifixion of Christ. There on Calvary we see the alarming alienation of a godless situation.

Yet surprisingly, a short time later, Jesus ends his life with another cry, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." The God who had forsaken him earlier is the same God to whom Jesus entrusts his soul forever. The absent God is now the abiding God! How shall we explain this apparent contradiction? Is it not a

logical absurdity? Can a person be forsaken by God at one moment and then commit himself or herself to the same God the next moment? This article explores the tensions between forsakenness and faith. It focuses on the suffering of Christ in order to better understand and cope with our own personal suffering.

The Question Suffering Asks

On Good Friday some people wept while others laughed. There were the mourners: "A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him" (Lk 23:27). There were the scoffers: "Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!' . . . 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself!' " (Mk 15:29-31). True. All Jesus could do was to continue tasting death for everyone and then commit his spirit to a God whose ways are

past finding out — a God who hears the cry of forsakenness but does not always answer. From the darkness surrounding Calvary the cry of Jesus goes out one last time but the divine silence is not broken. Heaven is quiet; God does not answer. Jesus absorbs the darkness into himself, bears the brunt of his own end (as well as ours), breathes his last and dies alone. His solitary suffering is over.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This is the question suffering asks. This is the spoken and unspoken question behind every personal tragedy and every national and international holocaust. It is really a veiled accusation. Such a question assumes that God is just and accountable for what goes on in this world. But does God ever answer that question? More often than not, we are left to answer it ourselves, if we are left at all. Jesus did not receive an immediate answer. His was an answerless pain. If we accept the resurrection as God's answer to Jesus'

question, then perhaps there is a lesson here for us. Divine answers come *after* our suffering, after we have struggled through our own spiritual wastelands as Jesus did. Suffering can be a desert of silence, silence so deep even the voice of God is mute.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Again, the question of suffering arises from anguished hearts. God does not mind us asking that question, even though God is never obligated to answer it. For our own sakes, God knows we must ask it. We must ask it! If we are ever going to become aware of our lostness, we must ask it. Such a question is a question of lostness. A complacent person who is reasonably well-off and self-satisfied would never ask the question of suffering. Only a lost and frustrated person asks it; only a person punctured with pain cries out about forsakenness. On the cross, when Jesus was lost and desperate, he asked why God had forsaken him. He did not feel it was sacrilegious to ask that question. A lost man or woman can skip over the niceties of formal prayer and just get to the point! Lostness is leverage (our only leverage) when addressing God.

The Suffering of Christ

Can we ever know what Jesus went through on Calvary? Can we ever experience the darkness as he did? Is his interior world accessible to us? Only through the power of imagination can we begin to tap the depths of Christ's suffering. But our imagination is often restricted by our belief that Jesus possessed divine foreknowledge which lessened the intensity of his human suffering. Granted, Jesus did possess divine foreknowledge according to the Gospel accounts. However, we are wrong in assuming that his divine foreknowledge lessened the intensity of his pain on the cross. Before the cross, Jesus spoke of his resurrection after three days. On the cross, there is no evidence that his knowledge of the resurrection brought any comfort to him. Jesus was not reading his lines off a prearranged cue card when he cried, "My God, my

God, why have you forsaken me?" He meant what he said.

The cry of Jesus is a quote from Psalm 22:1. The first stanza of this song reads:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry out by day,
but you do not answer,
by night, and am not silent.

This verse is part of a lament. Even a quick reading of various Psalms shows how central the lament was in Israel's life and worship (cf Ps 44, 74, 79). It was a literary form arising out of personal or national catastrophe. For example, the book of Lamentations is a compilation of various laments composed in the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem. A lament is full of passion and pain as it describes the sorrows of present suffering. To lament is to passionately voice one's griefs in the hope that God will hear and act to deliver. Lament is a sign to God that we have reached the end of our resources and rely solely upon him for our rescue.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Through his lament, Jesus cried out *against* God. The cry of Jesus was a cry of criticism, but it was a criticism rooted in anguish not anger. Walter Brueggemann observes that criticism begins when griefs are voiced. Criticism is personal hurt brought to public expression (*The Prophetic Imagination*, p. 21). Not all criticism is belligerent. Jesus' certainly was not. Nevertheless, lament is a form of criticism rooted in anguish. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is a desperate cry from the lips of a person who expects more of God than God is delivering. This is the spirit of all genuine lamentations.

God's ego is not so fragile as to be shattered by our criticisms. It is all right to direct our cries of anguish toward a God who seems

distant when we need him most. Such lamentation can mark the beginning of a deeper, more earnest spiritual life. It signals we are serious enough about God to contend with him. It means we are passionately involved in the despair of our own situation and looking to God for a solution. Passionate lamentation is always a part of intense suffering, and God does not cast us off when we complain. Our path and God's path intersect at the point of our deepest suffering. Even though we may hear no answer to our lament we can know we are in the right place. At least we care enough to cry.

The Solitude of Suffering

To suffer is a solitary thing. Jesus suffered and died alone. No one can ever fully enter into the interior world of Christ's passion. Similarly, my suffering is unique because it is *mine*, not someone else's. When forsakenness overwhelms me I feel its anxiety through and through. It is *my* existence which is threatened; it is my pain and no one else's. This is the solitude of suffering. One may be able to sympathize with and provide comfort for those who suffer. But one can never experience the fullness of suffering which the sufferer feels at the moment of his or her pain. This was driven home to my mind through a recent personal experience.

Last summer I suffered a cerebral aneurism while jogging. Fortunately, it was a minor one. Though I never lost consciousness, the situation was serious and the pain enormous. The first eighteen hours were frightening since no one knew how bad the hemorrhage was. The words of Paul kept coming to my mind:

We were under great pressure,
far beyond our ability to
endure, so that we despaired
even of life. Indeed, in our
hearts we felt the sentence of
death (2 Cor 1:8-9).

I was in too much pain to talk, but I could think about death. This was my closest encounter yet with death. Family and friends gathered around me to offer support; nurses were more than

helpful and considerate; doctors were polite and efficient. Yet none of them could enter my interior world. I was amazed at how lonely I felt. There was talk of brain surgery; talk about the risk factors involved; talk, talk, talk. All of this talk, however, could not enter into my personal pain. I was alone. I will never forget the solitude of suffering. This experience was uniquely mine and no one else could live it for me. It was a road I had to walk myself. The support of others helped but it did not reduce the suffering of the situation.

As I lay in the intensive care unit I began wondering why this injury had happened. I tried to find meaning in it. My thoughts were lifted to God but I received immediate answers, only persistent pain. It is so easy to find meaning in someone else's suffering! In my own suffering I could detect no meaning. My misfortune was a mystery. The stillness of my body reflected the stillness of God who seemed out-to-lunch.

A month later, while reading a book, I came across these words: A great deal has been written about the purifying, strengthening qualities of suffering. These qualities may be known to him who has suffered, but not to him who suffers. Within my actual suffering I detect no meaning. It would cease to exist or, at least, lose much of its sting, if I could only experience a universal meaning in it. To suffer is to be alone. No one can follow the sufferer into this most private world. (Louis Dupre, *The Deeper Life*, p 64)

When I read these words I knew they were true because I had experienced their truth in my own life. Suffering is suffering because we *don't* understand it! Only in retrospect can we sometimes gain a fresh perspective on our suffering, and then only *sometimes* (see Heb 12:11). We may talk about "noble" suffering or suffering for a "cause"; we may talk about suffering in order to be an example of faith to others. But all these explanations of suffering are far too abstract and idealistic to be of any help to the person who is suffering. Jesus found no

universal meaning in his suffering when he cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" His suffering had ceased to be meaningful to him. It had become pointless and unfair.

For ten months I had the opportunity to work as a full-time chaplain in a hospital. In that short period of time I think I saw enough suffering to last me a lifetime. At first I felt I needed to explain everyone's suffering to them in order to help them cope with it. I tried to figure out just why certain things had befallen individuals. I tried to be an answer man. But it didn't take me long to realize that most suffering cannot be explained in a satisfactory manner to the person who is doing the suffering. It is best to remain silent and offer your presence only. A dying person does not need a sermon or a superficial pep talk. The surviving parents of a teenage suicide do not need universal answers to their suffering. They wouldn't really hear such answers at the time anyway. They are too caught up in their present pain.

To suffer is to enter an entirely foreign world, a lonely, mysterious world. It is a world of unanswered questions which can lead to bitterness if one expects immediate answers or easy solutions. Longtime veterans of suffering know there is wisdom in patience and that questions of suffering should not be pushed too hard. They know God is present in our suffering often through his felt absence.

The cry of Jesus is a passionate groping for the presence of God in a situation pregnant with God's absence. Where was God when Jesus died on the cross? We might also ask the question: Where is God when our own suffering reaches a point of pointlessness? Sometimes we just don't know; we do not understand the workings of God amidst our pain. Yet we still cry out to God, even to an absent God.

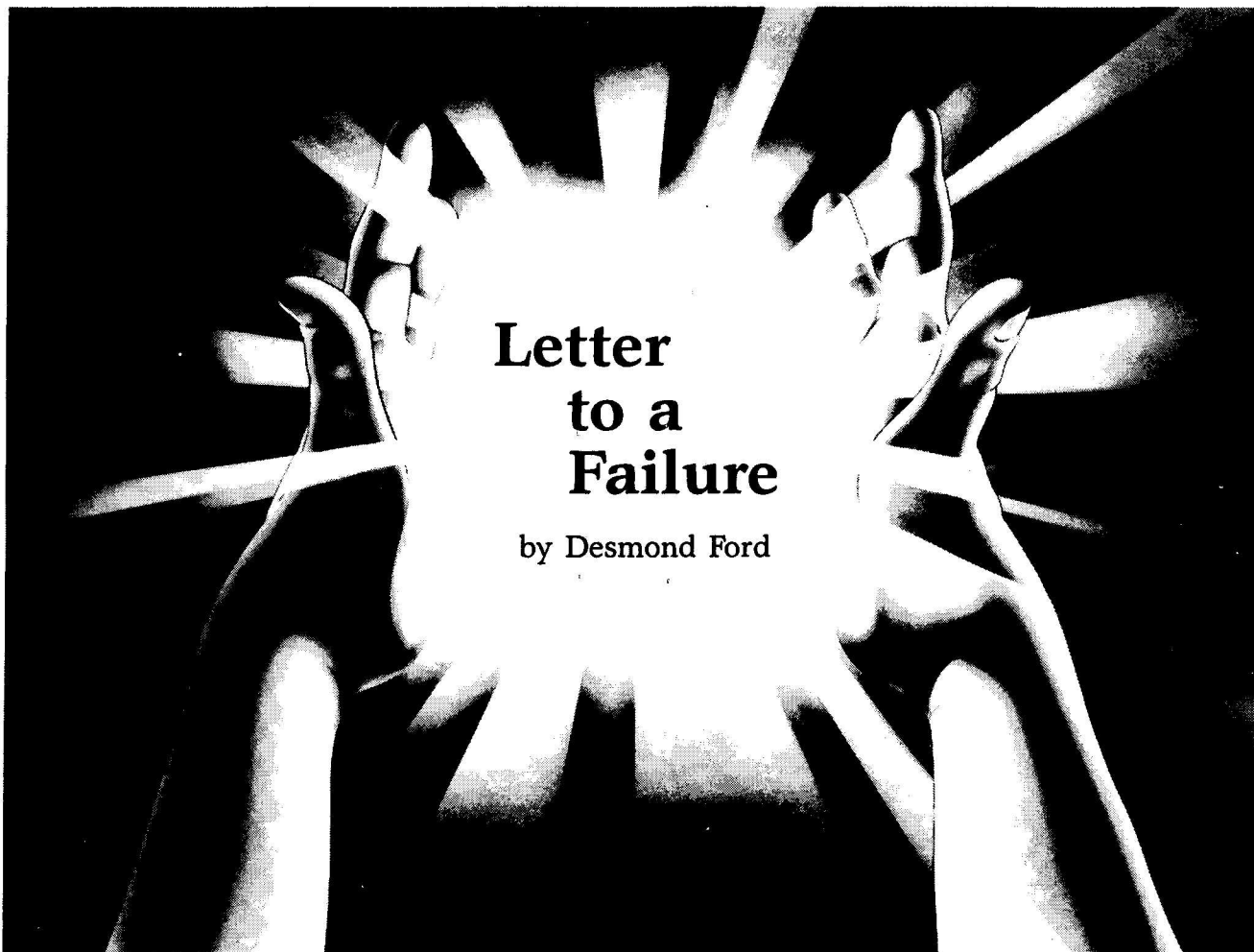
Faith, Hope and Suffering

So where do we stand? We stand at the intersection of faith, hope and suffering. We dwell in the land of no easy answers, the realm of mystery. Once upon a Friday

long ago Jesus cried out in anguish and received no immediate answers. The darkness of divine silence devoured his soul, but not before a final statement came from his parched lips, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." If we think suffering is a mystery, faith is even more of a mystery. For in the midst of no answers faith still commits itself to an absent God and dies trusting.

And what about hope? Hope is born in the crucible of suffering. We hope because we suffer. If we did not suffer we would not hope. Hope arises when better options to our suffering can be imagined. It is always related to better options. Hopelessness is a state of zero options, a "no exit" situation. But as long as there exist imaginative options, there is hope. These options, of course, are future-oriented. In other words, hope envisions a new tomorrow which transcends present suffering, a tomorrow when peace and praise will replace pain and persecution. Though this vision contradicts the facts of our present experience, it is the stuff of hope. Hope is a vision of better options.

Christian hope does not cushion us from the pain of present suffering. Pain is still pain, whether there is hope or not. Christian hope does not take away our feelings of forsakenness. We still lament our situation and contend with our absent God through cries of anguish. We still die, often alone. This is and always will be the tension between suffering and faith, between pain and hope. Our suffering takes place somewhere between "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." These two polarities exist whenever intense suffering confronts sincere faith. Christian hope captures our imaginations and transports us forward into a timeless age of peace brought about by the final triumph of God over evil and suffering. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that our hope is not mere wishful thinking. The empty tomb is evidence that the final triumph of God has already begun. Suffering is not the last word.



Letter to a Failure

by Desmond Ford

Dear Sue,

We have been friends these many years, and now you've done me the honor of asking for advice at the time when your life seems hardly worth the living. Well, as from one sinner to another, I'll try.

You say that you are "sick and tired of yourself," and that while you have had a head-knowledge of Christianity, your experience has been like a dowdy patchwork quilt. You want to know how this situation can be changed, and have asked for a strategy of behavior.

Sue, rock-bottom is not a bad place to reach. Dwight L. Moody's great friend and successor, R.A. Torrey, reached the verge of suicide in a lonely hotel room before his life was transformed. He found God near enough when he himself was needy enough. Moody's own experience, though not duplicating the agnostic despair of Torrey, reflects the same truth. After trying to demonstrate perpetual motion by calling on as many as 200 homes in a single

day for the spiritual welfare of the occupants, he became aware of his own deep poverty of soul. Then it was that God revealed himself in power, and a new Moody went forth to shake the world.

Have you ever noticed, Sue, the different manner in which Christ dealt with those who came to him? He told the haughty Pharisee, Nicodemus, that he could never enter heaven without being "born again," but there is no such demand made of the Samaritan woman mentioned in the next chapter (Jn 4). She was told instead about "the gift of God" and a fountain of everlasting life available for the taking. Similarly, in Matthew 23, we find Jesus uttering a series of terrible woes against people who felt soul-whole. What a contrast to the spirit he manifested towards publicans and sinners! May I remind you of the words of Augustine: "You could not be seeking God but for the fact that He has found you."

God is a soul farmer. He breaks

up the soil of the heart before planting the seed of eternal life and everlasting joy. How does he do this? By letting us go our own willful ways until we are almost shattered by the recoil of the whirlwind. God is very well-mannered, and does not thrust himself where he is not wanted. But he is ever there, standing patiently amid the shadows, waiting to answer our feeblest call. I like the story told by Rita Snowden. A guide and an inexperienced climber were forced to stay all night in the Pyrenees mountains. They couldn't get back to their ground base. Towards dawn there came a tempestuous wind that twisted trees and started rocks rolling down the mountain-sides. The newcomer to Spain was filled with terror and apprehension, but the guide softly murmured, "This is the way the dawn comes in the Pyrenees." And our dawn also sometimes comes through storm and tempest.

It sometimes takes a long time to learn that the universe is just

GOOD NEWS FOR KIDS

The Ups and Downs of Life

Story One from the
Book of Daniel

Gillian Ford

As I stared at all of this, I saw four wheels on the ground beneath them, one wheel belonging to each. The wheels looked as if they were made of polished amber and each wheel was constructed with a second wheel crosswise inside. They could go in any of the four directions without having to face around. The four wheels had rims and spokes, and the rims were filled with eyes around their edges.

(Ezekiel 1:15-18)

Each of the four cherubim had a wheel beside him — "The Whirl-Wheels," as I heard them called, for each one had a second wheel crosswise within, sparkled like chrysolite, giving off a greenish-yellow glow. Because of the construction of these wheels, the cherubim could go straight forward in each of four directions; they did not turn when they changed direction but could go in any of the four ways their faces looked. Each of the four wheels was covered with eyes, including the rims and spokes.

(Ezekiel 10:9-13)

What is up comes down, and what is down goes up. That is what the book of Daniel is all about. It's like the mysterious whirl-wheels in Ezekiel. Those wheels were very strange. They had cross-wheels inside them and could move in four directions without turning. And they were full of eyes!

Lots of people have wondered what on earth

those whirl-wheels were because there aren't any wheels on earth quite like them. Have you ever seen a bicycle or a car that goes in four directions without turning? But you see they were symbols or pictures in the mind of the prophet Ezekiel when he dreamed about heaven — pictures of God's working on the earth. Ezekiel taught that the whirl-wheels were part of God's moveable throne which He used when He moved from heaven to work on earth. They were like a chariot so that God could move freely about the earth.

The eyes in the whirl-wheels meant God could see everything. And he could move everywhere



at once (could move in four directions without turning). And when those wheels "stood" and "rose" it meant that whether things were good or bad, "up" or "down," God was always present to help out. Life can seem crazy sometimes but nevertheless, God is in control.

There are lots of ups and downs in the book of Daniel. But who is "up" and who is "down?" The people of God (the Jews) always seem to start off "down." They are in captivity to a fierce and cruel nation (Babylon) and usually seem to be in deep trouble. But, the mean Babylonians seem to be having a fine time. They have the power over life and death. They seem to control the lives of the Jews. Yes, they're really "up."

Daniel and his friends seem often about to lose their lives. They want to do what God has told them is right but it always conflicts with the wishes of their captors. And the Babylonians aren't about to make life easy for them. They give them food they cannot eat in chapter one of Daniel. They make an image which they force them to worship and throw them into a fiery furnace when they won't obey in chapter three. They put Daniel in a pit with hungry lions waiting for their supper in chapter five. But the good thing about these stories is that though God's people are often in trouble, and seem to be weak, they always end "up."

On the other hand, the Babylonians who had captured Daniel and his friends always start off up. They seem to have the power of life and death. They control the food that Daniel eats. They have the power to put Daniel and his three friends in the fiery furnace and the lion's den. And they are so strong that even if our heroes had swords and could use them, they could not fight Babylon, the most powerful nation on the earth at that time.

But things aren't what they seem because God is in control. He is the judge over all that is happening and He is watching what is happening. Every time the Jews are in trouble, he has an answer. But note this. He only works when Daniel and his friends are obedient to what they know is right. And, if they do what's right, he always helps.

So, the book of Daniel is trying to tell us that God is in charge. Are you in deep trouble, like Daniel, for doing right? God will take you from "down" to "up." Are you boastful and proud like King Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4? God can make you like a beast and take you from "up" to "down." The lesson is easy. If you are trying to do the right thing at school and the kids are teasing you — you're "down." Don't worry. God will put you "up" when He's ready. Likewise, if

you're a bully at school or being naughty and feeling "up," don't be too sure of yourself. Some day God will take you down a peg or two and put you in your right place.

I recently heard a true story about a boy who was spastic. That means he had trouble moving and speaking properly. He looked strange, even comical. One time when he went to Youth Camp, the kids had great fun laughing at him. When he'd ask for directions to go somewhere, they would mimic his walk and answer him in the same strange voice he had. He knew they were poking fun at him but he never got angry or fought back.

There had been many excellent speakers that week who had come to the camp to talk to the young people. One was a Miss Universe and she told about how being a Christian had helped her to be a great success. But there was something hard about the hearts of the kids at this Youth Camp. Nothing anyone said seemed to affect them.

Then it came through the grapevine that the spastic boy was going to take the devotional one evening in a particular hut. "What a joke," thought all the kids and not only those in that hut went, but the whole camp. They thought this would be the most entertaining part of the week. What a joke — what a chance for a laugh. They couldn't wait.

But when the time came and the spastic boy struggled painfully to stand and speak, there came a hush over his mocking audience. For he said in his strange voice, "I love Jesus, and He loves me." He said it once again and sat down.

Then there was no laughing — just silence among those kids. You wouldn't have seen one dry eye in that audience. That night fifty of the hard-hearted youngsters gave their hearts to Jesus.

You see, that boy was "down." He was the joke of the camp, someone to laugh at and play tricks on. Watching, you would have thought he should be the saddest person in the world. But what is "down" comes "up." In time he came to be respected because despite his handicap he loved Jesus and wasn't ashamed of Him, or himself.

So the book of Daniel teaches us that even though Jesus saves all who believe in Him, sometimes things go wrong. Often it's our own fault. Sometimes it's not.

But He still loves us just the same whether things go well or we're in trouble. And even though the Jews were down in Babylon and down in the dumps, God eventually brought them up through Daniel's faithfulness. And He is still making "downs" "ups" today.



Be Up and Doing

Desmond Ford

Years ago, boys and girls, there was a poem that was taught in almost every school in the country. It was a poem that crossed the ocean and spread like wildfire throughout the countries of Europe, being translated into many languages, even into Sanskrit, a well-known language of India. Even in the little-known country of China the poem was printed on a fan and became tremendously popular. Great men like Henry Ford memorized this poem and declared how much it inspired them towards effort and achievement. The famous Mahatma Gandhi, just a few days before his death, quoted it.

Well, in case you have not been taught it so far, let us give you some of the words:

*Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!—
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.*

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our life sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;*

*Footprints, that are perhaps another
Sailing o'life's solemn main,
A forelorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.*

*Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.*

But what I particularly want to tell you is how that poem was written. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a young professor at Harvard and to him sudden tragedy came with the death of his beautiful wife. For years the torment of his heart did not cease and his grief continued to overwhelm him. Though he was a poet, he lacked the heart to put pen to paper anymore. It seemed that he had no heart for anything and that life had become an empty dream.

One morning as he gazed out of his windows towards some beautiful elms in the fields outside, a conviction rushed upon him that he must cease to act as though life was an empty dream. He must be up and doing. For the first time in months he felt the desire to write poetry once more and

very quickly he traced the lines we have just given you above.

Longfellow called this poem "A Psalm of Life." Originally he did not show it to anyone else for he viewed it as a message just for his own heart. Later, however, he allowed it to be published and it went to the hearts of millions, blessing them as the thoughts had blessed him. On one occasion when this nation was polled to find its choice of the best poem, this one won first place with ease.

Into every life, even every young life, there come days when life doesn't seem worth living. At such a time we have to believe with all our hearts and minds that our sun will rise again and the shadows flee. We must go on living whether we feel like it or not, go on working whether we feel like that or not. Remember that the darkness of midnight is never permanent and that clouds always break and that every tunnel has its exit.

Do you remember that preacher who spoke fervently about the tragedy of Christ's sufferings on the cross and then added "that was Friday, Sunday is a'coming." Our Lord's death and resurrection are a pattern of life itself. In many sad and hard situations we will have to murmur to ourselves "this is Friday but Sunday is a'coming."

Our Lord Jesus, while hanging on the cross, was tempted to come down from it. The crowd jeered at him saying, "He saved others, himself he cannot save." But of course *he could* have saved himself but if so he would not have saved the world. There will be many crosses for us to bear in life and we will often be tempted to throw them away. But if we can learn to endure the cross and to do God's will however hard it seems, joy and fruitfulness and glory will not be far away.

Yes, you too can make your life sublime. You can make footprints on the sands of time, making the world a better place for your having been in it. Life is not but an empty dream, and the grave is not the goal. Therefore, "act, — act in the living Present!, Heart within, and God overhead!" Let us, then, be up and doing. For if God be for us, who can be against us?

Good News for Kids is dedicated to promoting the message and spirit of the gospel for children.

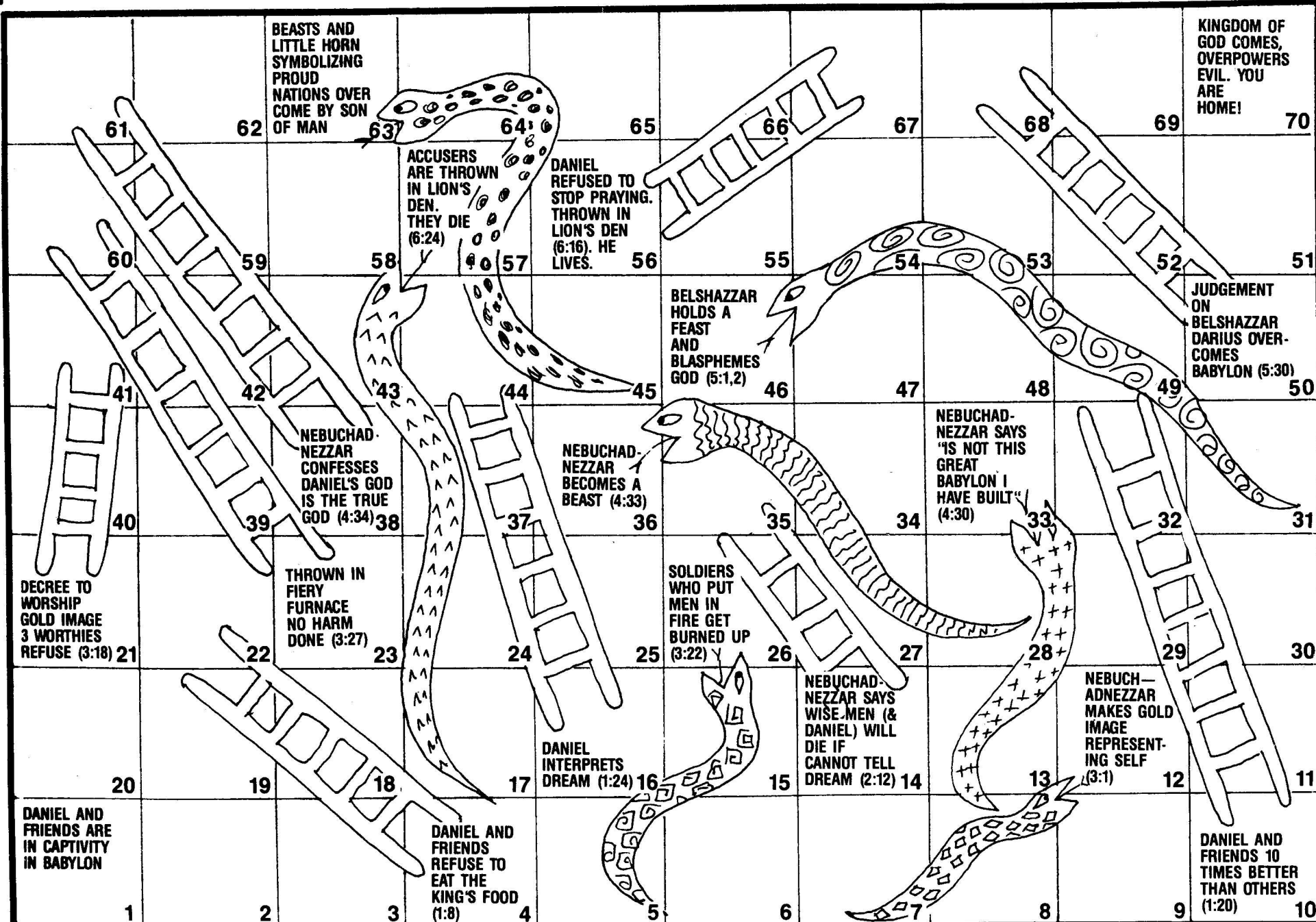
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Editor: Gillian Ford

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END HERE!



START HERE

Here's a puzzle that illustrates the Book of Daniel and it's "ups" and "downs." Throw a dice with a friend and see who can climb the ladders and avoid being swallowed by snakes and arrive at the Kingdom of God first!

that and not a multiverse, and that it is run by inviolable law. In our early years we frolic heedlessly and think we can do as we please without paying the piper. We live the cafeteria style of self-service, and act as though the world owed us everything and we owed it nothing. We seek kicks, and think we can dodge the kickbacks. We forget the terrible warning of teachers like William James:

Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never-so-little scar. The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying, 'I won't count this time!' Well, he may not count it, and a kind Heaven may not count it; but it is being counted nonetheless. Down among his nerve cells and fibers the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes. Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. — *Talks to Teachers*, p 78

This warning, of course, reinforces the biblical teaching of the tremendous importance of every choice, whether of thought, word, or deed. And the Bible itself is just a plain statement of how life works. It shows how all good and all evil must harvest. When we see this, our rebellion against commandments slackens, for we sense that the laws of God are actually clues to living. They are not arbitrary. Rather, they are the loving counsels of the One who made all things and who alone knows how all things both work and work out.

But Sue, I still haven't got to the heart of the matter, have I? You have made resolutions time and time again, but all your promises have proved ropes of sand. After a meeting where you experienced the wooing of the Spirit of God you have faced yourself and hated what you saw. Then have come

the cataracts of tears and the fierce resolves, but all in vain. You are aware also of how your failures have affected you. You have become terribly critical of all who stand in your way, particularly anyone representing some sort of authority. The way you have spoken repeatedly could give a listener the impression that YOU were the real authority on life, and that all others were failures. This is a well-known phenomenon.

Psychologists refer to it as projection. IT IS THOSE WHO HATE THEMSELVES WHO ARE HARD ON OTHERS. Your real problem then revolves around the issue of self-worth. The human heart is frequently ambivalent in its emotions, both loving and hating itself. How is this to be solved?

A true self-love, and love for God and my fellow man, comes only through the conviction that God loves me infinitely and endlessly.

Let me confess to you that too often I have viewed others in a way quite different from that of my Lord and Maker. He saw people not as they were, but as they might be, transfigured by his grace. This is a perspective we, too, must share. Whatever gets our attention, gets us. If we concentrate on our own weaknesses, or the weaknesses of others, then life deteriorates on the scale of geometrical progression. It has often been said that looking around brings confusion, looking within brings despair, and only looking up brings hope and joy and faith. It's true. That's the way it was with Noah and family in that cataclysm which ended the old world. They had but one window in the ark. They could not look out at their neighbors being crushed by falling boulders, or drowned by the swirling waters. They could not look behind them at the ruins of their former home, or ahead at nature's threatening convulsions. The only window was overhead, to remind them that God was to be the target of their thoughts and

hopes throughout the entire voyage.

Listen, Sue — your greatest need and mine is not a series of admonitions on how to improve our lives. What we all need is what an old preacher called "the expulsive power of a new affection!" He meant, of course, that the only way of driving out our self-centeredness was to be filled with a greater love than self-love. And this is the hub of all I could ever say to you. A TRUE SELF-LOVE, AND LOVE FOR GOD AND MY FELLOW MAN, COMES ONLY THROUGH THE CONVICTION THAT GOD LOVES ME INFINITELY AND ENDLESSLY.

So, I am not going to give you directions regarding how long to study the Bible, and how much to pray, or what meetings to attend. All that is in vain if the vital point is not seen, the one just mentioned. If they contribute to that, then they are good, otherwise all such is useless.

This is what is meant by the adage that every person's chief duty is adoration — meaning adoration of God. It is by beholding that we become changed. I repeat it — whatever gets our attention, gets us. Where are you looking, Sue? To what do you listen? What do you read? Of what stuff are your daydreams made? Do you give God the chips or the logwood of your time and energy? Scripture says that a fool's eyes are at the ends of the earth — anywhere except upon the God in whom he lives, moves, and has his being. Folly indeed! He, God, is the Author and Finisher of life. He is our chief Good, the One Indispensable. This is the meaning of Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these [other] things shall be added unto you."

And so, Sue, I'm not going to advise you further. Advice is not your need. It's about time you started believing not good advice — but the good news! The good news that Christ receives sinners, that he does not reckon sins against any who come to him, that all the failures of the past can be forgiven in a moment of time as you see that Christ paid for them all! "He that believeth on the Son

hath everlasting life" — hath it NOW, not WILL HAVE. What does it mean to believe on the Son? It means to see that he was made to be sin for you, though he had no sin, that you might be treated as righteous, though you are not righteous (see 2 Cor 5:21). It means to recognize the central truth of Scripture that "if One died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor 5:14). You paid for your sins in your Representative, in A.D. 31.

This news breaks the chains of guilt, that guilt which worries and torments you in all your quieter moments. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). But now for a warning. If you look at your feelings, you'll miss what God wants to give you. Having faith in Christ is not some sort of feeling. It is choosing to believe what God says and acting on it regardless of how you feel. Will you read that again? Feelings are what happens to you. Neither you nor God need to be concerned with them. He looks at your choices only. Choose to believe. Whether you feel like it or not, act as though you knew the good news to be infallibly true — true for you. Remember the man who came to Christ at Cana and asked for the healing of his son at Capernaum? He was told to go his way believing Christ had already

healed his boy. Each step on the road home illustrated what faith is. Faith is going on in God's way, according to his directions, believing all will turn out as he has promised. Your feelings will come right if you ignore them. According to Romans 15:13, joy and peace come *through* believing, not *before*. After all, when do you feel better, before or after you take the recommended medicine? Moody asked one troubled inquirer as to what saved Noah, the ark or his feelings. She got the point and went away rejoicing.

Sue, you've been looking in all the wrong places at yourself and at others. Give it away. Look to Calvary. See Christ dying for you, as though you were the only person in the world. Note that his hands are nailed because of the wrong things your hands have done. His feet are spiked because of the wrong places your feet have taken you. His brow is pierced with thorns because of the idle and malicious thoughts you have thought. Hear him say to one guilty of all the sins in the book, "Verily, thou shall be with Me in Paradise." It's all for you, Sue, therefore take it. And take it now, regardless of how you feel.

Your Dad has told you many times that you are undisciplined. So was he, Sue, before he became a Christian. This good news I've

repeated is the only solution. When we see that God accepts us just as we are, weak and vicious, then simultaneously we receive strength to cease being what we have been. "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14). When you see that Christ paid for all your sins, past, present, and future, and that he accepts you regardless of your failures to keep his commandments — then the knowledge of his loving kindness snaps the bonds of evil habit and makes us free for the first time in our lives. To our surprise we will now find obedience both easy and a pleasure. Sue, stop and think! You must, right now, choose either to believe your own weak, deceptive heart — or GOD. The wrong choice leads to sorrow, disappointment, frustration, and eternal death. The other leads to happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction, and eternal life.

And here my letter must end. For when one has offered the unconditional love of God, what else could be said? It's yours if you want it, Sue, and it will change all else. Will you take it? Will you take it NOW?

Your friend,
Desmond Ford.

BRUISED PLUMS and DRIED APRICOTS

by Keith F. Allen

Keith Allen, author of this article is a school teacher in Hobart, Tasmania.

To call a Christian brother a Pharisee is not to bestow a compliment. Since the time of Jesus the word has been associated with traits of pride, legalism and hypocrisy. Rabbinic literature contains seven pen pictures of common Pharisaic types. Only one of these is admirable. One of the majority is the "ever-reckoning" Pharisee, who, like a human calculator, is continually absorbed in thoughts of what good things he can do in order to cancel out his many neglects. Another is the "bruised" Pharisee who tries so hard to avoid looking at an attractive woman, that he injures himself by walking into a wall. The bruised Pharisee is in reality typical of all Pharisees. As we shall see later, Pharisaism wounds the individual and those who come in contact with it.

In the first century A.D. the Pharisees were the largest religious faction in Palestine. They began as a definite movement shortly after 106 B.C. They became known as the "Separated Ones". They attempted to separate themselves from ritual defilement and impurity. They set about the task of washing the temple vessels with great zeal. The Sadducees, somewhat amazed at all this, were moved to remark, "Soon they will dip the sun in water, too!"

If they were diligent in separating themselves from ritual defilement they were also no slouches in the area of rule-keeping. Each of the Ten Commandments was surrounded by a picket fence of paling-like prescriptions. This fence was equally as sacred as the garden. These "by laws", were so multitudinous that it required a host of professionals to apply them. They addressed themselves to such conundrums as, what to do if the Passover falls on a Sabbath. Could the Sabbath be broken for the sake of the Passover ritual?

While the Pharisees were pious and the Scribes erudite, they earned no words of praise from Jesus. His most scathing rebukes were aimed directly at them. Large portions of the four Gospels consist of accounts of their attitudes; their opposition to Jesus and His death at their hands. Why is it that the Bible treats the conflict between Christ and the Pharisees in such detail?

In reflecting upon an answer to this question we should remember that the Bible is a book that transcends time and place. Individuals, groups and institutions portrayed in Scripture are typical of humanity throughout history. The Bible is a mirror in which we see our own face. The appalling truth is that Pharisaical attitudes come naturally to the religious. The Bible has so much to say about the Pharisees because I am a Pharisee at heart, and so dear reader are you.

Let us examine the characteristics of this kind of religion. In Luke chapter eighteen we find an account of two men. One stood up and prayed about himself; the other said, God have mercy on me, a sinner. There are two linked attitudes here. The Pharisee thinks that his own abstentions place him in favour with God. He also believes that these achievements are reason for self-congratulation. Jesus commends the stigmatized tax gatherer because he places himself completely at the mercy of a gracious God.

Clearly Jesus is not impressed with self centred religion. His Sermon on the Mount is meant to undermine it. He shows that it is the poor in spirit and the meek who inherit the Kingdom of God. Jesus' rebuke to the Laodicean church is aimed at those who are theologically and doctrinally wealthy, yet poverty stricken in their possession of a personal relationship with Jesus. The only riches recommended by our Saviour are the riches of repentance and the acceptance of Him as the Lord of life and salvation. Sadly, this is something most of the Pharisees could never bring themselves to acknowledge.

Jesus offers Himself as the object of true religion. He came to give us life that we may have it abundantly. Sin has been defined as the transgression of the law. It may also be described as anything that diminishes our humanity. A Pharisaic religion favours the view that righteousness is the endless enumeration of things we shouldn't do. According to Jewish tradition there were thirtynine types of activity forbidden on the Sabbath. This perception of goodness in negative terms leads to a denial of humanity. This denial eventually becomes institutionalised as part of religious practice.

Have you ever wondered why, until recent times, Bibles were black? Why some equate holiness with sombre expressions, sitting still, not making any noise except when it is time to pray (in a type of English several hundred years old)? Why sex, fun, laughter, anger and self-respect are often seen as unreligious? Pharisaic religion is a dried apricot religion. Compared to the original it is shrunk and sour.

The more he can catch them out, the more confident he feels about himself. And so it is that such people have a vested interest in sin.

Returning to Luke chapter eighteen again, we find the Pharisee saying "God, I thank you that I am not like other men." He says this because for him criticism is a necessity. While he aims at perfection, he knows in his heart that it is unobtainable. He knows that he is not perfect, but neither is anyone else and this is a

source of great relief. The sufferer of the perfectionist disease has found a remedy. He must note carefully the faults of others. The more he can catch them out the more confident he feels about himself. And so it is that such people have a vested interest in sin. They need to point it out in others as a salve for their own lack. Impelled by insecurity such individuals and groups, with an air of piety, lament and bemoan the condition of their peers. However, there are those who go further. Compelled incessantly to affirm that they are "not as other men", they find it necessary to attribute evil to as many innocent pursuits as possible.

It would be wrong to imagine that all who act this way are hypocrites. There were many Pharisees who were genuine in their attempts to earn salvation. Nicodemus was one of these. But we do well to note that religious rites designed to achieve purification and earn merit abound throughout the world to such an extent that we must conclude that the desire to earn one's own salvation is a part of human nature. Christians are not immune to this powerful motivation.

It sometimes appears in transmuted form in the way they relate to Jesus. Many who sincerely desire to please him do so out of an acute regard for His amazing grace. However, they see Him more as an Example than a Saviour. Because of this they embark upon a struggle designed to convince themselves and the Lord that His sacrifice for them was not a waste of time.

While they may be sincere, the consequences for church life are the same as has been outlined above. The compulsion to pick motes out of peoples's eyes leads to much wounding and bruising of human relationships. Jesus pointed out that heaven is gained not looking at His example so much as by living in Him and through Him. He said: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full". John 10:7-10.

We shall now examine another characteristic of Pharisaic religious thinking. Namely, the view that righteous behaviour is most aptly defined as rule keeping and ritual. That is, when adherence to rule and ritual is equated with holiness. An example of this type of thinking may be seen in the following quotation from "The Jewish Dietary Laws".

"We must show that our religious commandments are not mere ceremonies to be disregarded at will, but diverse rules of life for the people of God . . . That the commandments of the Torah represent divine thoughts implanted in man through symbolic action. They are religious power stations for the creation of holiness among the people of Israel."¹

While most Christians may claim that they do not equate ritual with righteousness in this way, there is ample evidence that many adhere to the view of practice. I do not intend to explore the full effect of this kind of thinking on liturgy and conscience. Any reader who has ever served on a church board, will no doubt be able to reflect sorrowfully on numerous examples. However, I would like to give some attention to the phenomenon of rigorous rule-keeping known as legalism.

Once again we bend our gaze upon the by now uncomfortable Pharisee. We noticed that he commended himself to God because he had abstained from socially unacceptable practices, such as stealing, adultery and tax collecting. In the introductory remarks to this scene, we find the words, "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told his parable. . . ." Luke 18:9. Further on in this chapter, we find the Pharisee's mirror image – the Rich Young Ruler. A man who was under the illusion that he had kept all the commandments since he was a boy. He too was confident of his own righteousness. Jesus tactfully showed him that he had not even kept the first and most basic commandment. He had placed his own interests before his loyalty to God. Jesus was very kind to this young man. Had he wished he could have given several tests, all of which would have shown that his spiritual lack was far greater than he had ever imagined. Jesus reply to the young man is not instructive. He says, "sell all that you have and follow me." He presents him with a test that clearly shows that the observance of one, several, or even all of the commandments is not always the same thing as a personal subjection to Jesus' Lordship.

Like the rich young man and the Pharisee, individuals, groups and even churches may commended themselves to the Lord as commandment keepers. Some even

accord themselves a special title, indicating their place in the Lord's favour.

The attitudes of the two people above is legalistic. They are examples of a formulated, delimited righteousness in which sins are ranked according to socially accepted norms of vice and virtue. While the mass of rules was large, it was theoretically finite. What emerges is, that the Pharisaic concept of human perfectibility was based on an erroneous understanding of sin. This, together with the fact that the contemporary religious culture was tightly linked to their social status, was at the heart of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.

Christ's solution to the problem was not for people to become more anxious, vigilant and diligent. His solution was for sinners to become new people by laying down their life and taking up His.

On one side were the Pharisees attached to the belief that man could gain eternal life through obedience to the Law. On the other side was Jesus presenting Himself as Saviour. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus goes to great lengths to explain that the common variety of "law-keeping" was a failure. He showed that any act that detracted from the dignity, humanity and personality of a person came under the principle of killing. Thus Jesus upset the legalistic apple-cart. He taught that each commandment applied to a limitless number of situations and relationships; that the demands of the law were infinite. His solution to the problem was not for people to become more anxious, vigilant, diligent and exact. His solution was for sinners to become new people by laying down their lives and taking up His.

Jesus said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:7.

The doctrine of righteousness by faith that Jesus propounded has much to do with works, for He said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees' and

the Teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Matthew 5:20. But notice also – and this is the whole point of what has been said so far – these works are those that belong absolutely, entirely and completely to Jesus who is Lord of Forgiveness and Lord of Righteousness.

This truth is so vital and so basic that Jesus left it with us in concrete form in the sacrament of Holy Communion. As the bread and the wine are digested the nutriment goes to every part of the body. The food actually becomes our life. Jesus wants to become our life too. He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." John 6:53. It is His life that bears fruit in us. "I am the vine, you're the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:6.

The Pharisaic disease is healed in Jesus. Our Saviour invited Nicodemus to become a new person. To him He declared, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

The apostle Paul, that one time Pharisee and wounder of men and women, was able to exult, "I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20. There is now no need for Christians to wound each other.

Neither is there any need for us to scourge Jesus again in the person of our brother or sister. All the bruising and wounding that ever needed to be done has been done, for "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." Isaiah 53:4,5.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Questions and Answers

Q. Does GNU preach a "law-free" gospel?

A. Much depends on what is meant by the expression "law-free." The word "law" has a variety of connotations in the New Testament. In some contexts it is highly nuanced, in others it seems to be used in a very general way. Paul definitely teaches that the Christian is no longer under the law (Rom 6:14). In his letter to the Galatians he wrote:

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law (3:25).

However, in the same letter he states:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful

nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a *single command*: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

Where did Paul get this "single command"? As every Bible margin indicates he took it from the very heart of the law (see Lev 19:18). So Paul's rejection of the law is not to be interpreted as an absolute rejection of everything in the law. It seems to me that John Ziesler is correct when he wrote:

Naturally, this rejection of the Law is not a rejection of its diagnostic or prophetic roles, nor is it a rejection of everything in the Law. Nevertheless what is accepted is because of Christ, not because it is in the Law.

(*Pauline Christianity*, p 107)
(Ziesler's last point should be noted. Some Christians seem only to be familiar with great principles of the Ten Commandments as they exist in their Old Testament form.

Their New Testament expression should not be ignored).

It is important to ask what really lies behind the word "law" in the polemical letters of Paul. It seems to me that Paul is really against those who were using certain "works of law" as a condition for getting into the covenant community. These conditions were set in order to preserve the nationalistic distinctions between Jew and Gentile. This insight helps us to understand why Paul can say that the law in itself "is holy, just and good" but on other occasions speak about it in a rather negative fashion.

For the Judaizers of Paul's day the question was always: What is the relation of this man Jesus to the center of our religion, the Mosaic Law? However, for those who had accepted Christ as God's final word, the question became: What is the relation of the Mosaic Law to the center of our religion, the Lord Jesus?

GNU SEMINARS

GNU Pastor, Ron Allen recently completed a weekend itinerary, which took him to Canberra, Tumut, Albury and as far south as Wangaratta. The trip involved meetings and informal visitation with families and individuals. This Pastoral ministry is one that GNU is anxious to extend as far as possible. If you would like Ron to come to your area for cottage meetings or a personal visit, contact the office and he will be happy to include you in his travel schedule.

Consult the column opposite regarding GNU seminars for May and June.

Sydney

May 4-12 Midday Potluck lunch. Meeting 2.00 pm. Uniting Church Hall, Hinemoa Ave., Normanhurst.

Gold Coast

May 10-7.30 pm. Phone (075) 39 0555 for details.

Brisbane

May 11-10 am. Auchenflower Uniting Church, Weinholt St., Auchenflower.

May 11-3.00 p.m. Rochedale State High School, Priestdale Road, Rochedale.

Melbourne

May 18-10.45 am. East Hills Christian Fellowship, Salvation Army Citadel, Wontina Road, Ringwood.

May 18-2.30 pm. Denham Street Uniting Church, Hawthorn.

Murwillumbah

May 25 and 25-Phone (066) 79 5215 for details.

Sydney

June 1-12 Midday Potluck lunch. 2.00 pm Meeting. Uniting Church Hall, Hinemoa Ave., Normanhurst.

Perth

June 8-10.00 am. Bayswater Christian Fellowship, Bayswater Uniting Church, Murray Street, Bayswater.

GOOD NEWS FOR ADVENTISTS

The presentation of the gospel is the primary task of Good News Unlimited. However, there are times when it becomes necessary to defend the gospel against doctrinal aberrations that have robbed many Christians of that assurance of salvation which the gospel brings. In *Good News for Adventists*, the authors, Desmond Ford, Brad McIntyre and Noel Mason, critique the traditional Adventist doctrine of the Investigative Judgment. In a Christian spirit the authors point out this doctrine's inadequate scriptural basis and its incompatibility with certain elements of the New Testament gospel.

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(Date of publication May 15, 1985)

Odds and Ends

GNU Board

Items voted at a recent meeting of GNU directors include the following:

1. That the office purchase a Sony High Speed Cassette to Cassette printer. This valuable equipment has already been acquired and is now in service. We are confident of being able to provide high quality cassettes with minimum delay.
2. That serious study be given to the matter of purchasing a house in the Hornsby area. The house to be used as a dwelling for GNU staff as well as providing space for the GNU office. It is thought that this move may result in considerable savings for GNU.

GNU Fellowships

Many ministered to by GNU products and services, are people, who for one reason or another find their spiritual needs not fully serviced by their traditional denominational affiliation. To help meet these needs GNU will, where requested, foster the growth of Christian fellowships consistent with the purposes of the GNU organization.

GNU wishes to be a preaching and teaching resource for such groups while itself benefiting from any commitment that the group might make to the evangelistic goals of GNU

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The Gospel on Radio

These stations carry the GNU broadcast. Note the times.

2BS Bathurst	Sunday 9 PM
2BE Bega	Sunday 6.05 am
2CHY FM Coffs Harbour	Sunday 9.30 am
2RG Griffith	Sunday 8.30 pm
3CV Bendigo	Sunday 8.15 am
3HA Hamilton	Sunday 8.15 pm
5 PBA FM Adelaide	Sunday 9 pm

1986 Seminars

Due to the success of the recent seminars by Dr. Ford, in Australia, plans are being made for another series to be conducted in February March of '86. It is anticipated that Dr. Ford be accompanied by another preacher from the U.S. It is also hoped that there will be a longer stay this time, by the visiting Pastors and that more attention will be given to Adelaide and Perth along with country centres.

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