

# Good News Unlimited

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Solo Christo—Sola Scriptura—Sola Fida—Sola Gratia



Through  
Misery  
To  
Mercy

by  
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## Editorial

**T**he art of harmlessness. Ah, what an art it is! Skillfully developed by the lovers of institutions, nurtured and perpetuated by those wholly devoted to the system, harmlessness is an undying art and a part of every politician's survival kit. If you want an enduring place among the status quo, learn to be harmless. No one will ever bother you.

True prophets are a pain in the neck because they are never harmless. That's their problem. That's also why they seldom survive the system they criticize. They are flattened beneath the steamroller of entrenched traditions. True prophets don't understand what it takes to survive within the system. They don't know the subtle trick of the trade. They just struggle along speaking the truth indiscriminately, as if knowledge of the truth really changes anything. Don't they realize that institutions are not interested in truth but in survival?

No, don't be like the prophets. Be harmless. This will insure your future. No one will ever criticize you for being harmless; you won't get canned being harmless; in fact, you won't even be noticed if you're harmless.

But you must be cagey. Avoid speaking your mind. Whatever you do, don't bare your soul or say what you honestly feel. Who do you think you are anyway, some almighty reformer? Are you wise enough to question the collective wisdom of your superiors? Instead, soak your words in such milk-toasty mush that no one will know where you stand. If you are forced to be decisive, always agree with the majority. Never be negative because this upsets everyone, causing insecurity — the greatest threat to any institution. Preserve security at all costs! Stay upbeat and positive, especially when things are gloomiest. After all, the ship's going through to the end despite leaks, right? (You must answer, "Right!"). So don't undermine the authority of even the most incompetent leader. Remember, you may be in a similar position someday if you play your cards right.

Another tip: keep the big picture in view. Don't get sucked into a present crisis which threatens to turn over the whole apple cart. Radicals come and go, along with their causes. But you must keep in view the big picture, like your approaching promotion or tenure or ordination or retirement or pension or vacation. Don't sacrifice all these things for some urgent crisis. It will pass soon enough and business will continue as usual. Ride out the storm on your harmless wings.

These are merely a few suggestions for developing the art of harmlessness or, if you prefer, the politics of survival. You will learn more as you go, for once you've made the system your god, you really have no choice. Strange, how men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist and Jesus never caught on to these things. I guess they were too busy trying to change the world. How foolish. How harmful.

—Brad McIntyre

*There is mercy  
in the midst  
of our misery.*

## Through Misery To Mercy

by  
Ron Allen



It isn't easy to detect mercy in the midst of misery or to see grace amidst judgment. But if the gospel teaches us anything, it is that in Jesus Christ mercy and judgment have kissed each other. On the cross, Christ endured the judgment of God that we might taste God's mercy.

But how can this be? How can an act of judgment also be a deed of mercy?

### Jeremiah's Misery

The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, knew rejection first hand. Called to the prophetic office in a time of national crisis, Jeremiah's career spanned over fifty years (ca. 625-580 BC). He witnessed the invasion of Judah

by the Babylonians and the destruction of the temple. While still a young man, Jeremiah was made a spokesperson for God. His task: to preach against many things that his fellow Jews held sacred. This brought him into conflict with the authorities of his own nation.

But God made a promise to Jeremiah. "Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land" (Jer 1:18-19). As long as Jeremiah clung to God's presence, he would be impregnable despite opposition. His misery would be turned into mercy.

The essential elements of Jeremiah's message are in his temple sermon, parts of which are in chapters 7 and 26. In this sermon, Jeremiah enraged the priests by referring to the temple as a den of robbers. He told them that the temple and the things associated with it were worthless. The priests were so incensed by Jeremiah's sermon that they said he should be executed.

From then on, Jeremiah's life was worthless to them. Since questioning the religious authorities, he was regarded as a pest and a scab. His friends disappeared. Any camaraderie he once had with his fellow priests was now gone. The people in his hometown felt so disgraced by his performance that they disowned him, actually hatching a plot to kill him. Jeremiah was even banned from visiting his parents' house for any encouragement — they too were disgusted with him and were part of the plot to kill him.

God told Jeremiah he shouldn't marry. "You will be childless because I am going to destroy this people. They will be a childless people" (Jer 16:2). So he lacked even the comfort of an understanding mate.

### Through Misery to Mercy

Among other things, the Lord told Jeremiah that he must not attend weddings because "the sound of weddings and merry-making is soon to end in the land." He was not to attend funerals. Why? Because he must not mourn over this people. They deserved what God was about to do to them. With no social life, forsaken by colleagues, friends and family, Jeremiah was destitute of any circle of companions.

More than this, the people misunderstood his message. They viewed Jeremiah as a traitor. To them, his stirring judgments were signs of disloyalty not divine mercy. He spoke frankly about the people's sins and the sham of the sacred institutions. For this he received the label "blasphemer." Being of a sensitive nature, Jeremiah wanted only the best for his people, but he would not soft-peddle their sins.

Near the end of his long

ministry, Jeremiah had little to show for his pains. From a human standpoint he was a complete failure. The religious leaders never accepted his testimony, the civil leaders and the kings ignored his counsel, and even after the city had been burned to the ground and all his predictions came true, the remnant of the people still refused to listen to him.

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### When Believers Weep

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Jeremiah's experience caused untold personal sorrow. He is called "the weeping prophet" because he felt the pain of his situation so keenly. Often his unpopularity reduced him to tears and he found himself in constant tension between his task and his own human weakness.

The book of Jeremiah contains sections called his "confessions." In passionate poetry Jeremiah bares his soul before God and complains bitterly about his persecution. For example, in chapter 20 he takes the Lord to task by exclaiming, "You seduced me Lord. You seduced me." Here the prophet is like a woman sexually violated by a heartless man and left abandoned and despised. God led Jeremiah into this tough mission only to abandon him when the going got rough. At least this is how Jeremiah felt during his lowest moments.

In the same chapter, we see this man of God wishing that he had never been called. He is tempted never to preach again. He goes on to curse the day of his birth and to wish himself dead. In chapter 9 there is another typical emotional outburst. He says, "I wish I had a place to go away in the desert. A lodging place for travellers where I could get away from my people."

Is it possible to find any mercy in such abject misery?

Perhaps you are moved by Jeremiah's terrible situation. Perhaps you have been in similar circumstances. Have you ever taken a stand on an issue and lost some friends in the process? Have you ever felt compelled to make an unpopular assessment of something that people near to you hold in reverence? Have you ever disagreed, for conscience' sake, with your religious leaders? Have

you ever wished that you could travel away to some hiding place in the wilderness, away from your people — the ones that make you feel terrible? Have you ever wept because of turmoil in your religious environment? Have you ever wished that you had never heard some things, so that you wouldn't have to make a decision about them? Have you ever said, "I wish I had never been born"?

Where does one who identifies with the gospel turn for solace when he or she loses all friends because of the gospel? I believe that there is an answer in Jeremiah's experience. The message he bore was at one and the same time the cause and cure of his woes. Let's look at the substance of his message.

*The backdrop to Jeremiah's prophecy is Israel's appalling guilt. Only by coming to terms with their sin and accepting God's punishment of it could these people find mercy.*

In Jeremiah 1:10 we learn that there were two aspects to his preaching. First, he was to uproot, tear down, destroy and overthrow. Only then could he build and plant. As you read Jeremiah, there is plenty in it about tearing down and uprooting. Judgment is Jeremiah's main theme.

On the other hand, the careful reader will see that Jeremiah, true to his calling, has some important things to say about building and planting. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that pulling down and destroying always precedes building and planting. The Lord obviously intends mercy for his people, but it is never mercy without judgment.

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### Judgment Before Mercy

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The backdrop to Jeremiah's prophecy is Israel's appalling guilt. Prophet, priest, king and people are all bent on a course of rebellion. Over and over again, we hear Jeremiah's lonely voice being lifted in warning, "The Lord is going to visit this place in

judgment. Terrible things will happen to this land. There will be no cities left standing. Slain corpses will be everywhere."

As Jerusalem's end approached, Jeremiah warned the people to submit to the Babylonian armies. Their only hope was to accept the Babylonian seige as an instrument of divine justice. God wanted mercy for the people but he was not going to provide it without a full settlement of those matters which had brought about their problems in the first place.

The judgments of God forecast by Jeremiah were disguised mercies. Judah must be willing to face the music of judgment against sin. *Only by coming to terms with their sin and accepting God's punishment of it could these people find mercy.* This was Jeremiah's message. As such, it was the everlasting gospel through and through. For the gospel addresses itself to the horrible fact of sin. Sin is a fact. It is the fact which separates man from the blessedness of God's presence and favor. And the gospel provides mercy for the sinner without letting sin off the hook.

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### The Curse of Sin

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Why is sin so objectionable to God? Because sin is deadly insubordination to divine authority. Sin is rebellion and treason against God's government. Although God is our creator and sustainer, sin strikes at God like a vicious snake.

Like the immune system with our physical bodies, the universe has a built-in immune system designed to reject sin in every form. Things which do not glorify God and reflect his holiness are rejected outright as dangerous aliens. When the gospel is preached it treats sin as an intruder and aims to tear it down and uproot it. In this way the gospel arouses the hostility of the sinner. This was the reason for Jeremiah's unpopularity. His message caused his sorrows. But he discovered that it cured them also. This was a discovery he did not reach easily.

In Jeremiah 15:19, God reminds the prophet that he too is still a sinner in need of repentance. The messenger is not immune from the



barbs of the message! The gospel says there is no difference between us, for all have sinned. It is all too easy for Christians to resent mistreatment and injustice and thus forget about their own need for repentance. Pride is so rooted in us that every advance in grace can become a temptation and an occasion for sin. It is possible to study the gospel merely to nail people who don't accept it. But we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. We must repent. We must come to the cross daily.

### Christ — Our Substitute

Now let us visit Calvary, where Jesus absorbed for us the divine judgment on sin. God's hatred of sin was experienced by Christ. God's opposition to sin was fully met by Christ. God's just response to rebellion was meted out to Christ. Christ was weighed in the balances of eternal justice and the verdict was "Guilty!" The sentence: everlasting death.

Since Christ lived and died as our representative, he suffered all that we should have suffered. You might say, when Jesus died God hunted down all sinners and brought them to justice. Our sins have gone to judgment in Christ, and a full reckoning has been made for them. Therefore, we may claim mercy!

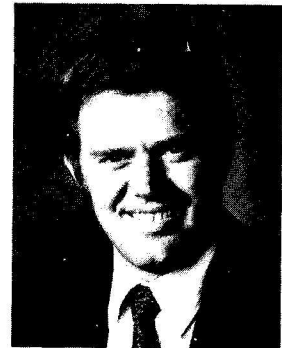
### Jeremiah and Christ

Like Christ, Jeremiah never married. Like Christ, he was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. He was to tear down and destroy, build and plant. Like Christ, he witnessed against the religious authorities. Like Christ, he appeared to be against the sacred institutions, such as the temple. Like Christ, he wept over his people and the temple. Like Christ, he forecast the temple's desolation. Like Christ, his life appeared as a failure.

Jeremiah's troubles resulted in fellowship with God. It can be the same for us. There is a sweetness

in trouble for the gospel's sake because it puts us at close quarters with Christ and brings fellowship which we could not have had otherwise.

But there's another benefit to trials. They can make the Christian savor the mercy of God all the more because of the way our trials contrast with Christ's trials. For though we may suffer, we never suffer as Jesus did. We may be rejected by men, but, mercy of mercies, we are never rejected by God. There is mercy in the midst of our misery.



RON ALLEN

## God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

# JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

## Part II

by  
Brad McIntyre



*Let us remember that every true revival is due to a renewed focus upon Christ alone.*

**I**n Part One of this article we noticed that John the Baptist was a herald of Christ — a divinely chosen forerunner. We saw that he came upon the scene of biblical history as a new prophet announcing the impending judgment and calling for repentance and redress. Now we will draw some lessons from John's life and death which will hopefully inspire our faith and edify us spiritually. I have organized our study under three headings: Rigor, Revival, and Resignation.

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### Rigor

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When I think of John the Baptist, I think of spiritual rigor or discipline. He was called from birth to a specific task which would shape his entire upbringing and lifestyle. He lived for one purpose: to prepare the way of the Coming One. Of him it was said,

"he shall drink no wine nor strong drink" (Lk 1:15). Here we catch a hint of John's ascetic lifestyle even before his birth. John is to be a Nazarite for his entire life, like Samson and Samuel. Rather than the superficial and debilitating excitement of intoxicants, John is to feed upon the supernatural nourishment of the Holy Spirit, for "he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Lk 1:15). Thus John became "strong in spirit," and his spiritual strength was developed "in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel" (Lk 1:80).

The wilderness. Wild and isolated, separate and lonely, the wilderness can be the place where a person finds God. The wilderness is a rigorous environment in which survival is not guaranteed. It requires much physical stamina and psychological

fortitude to exist in such a hostile and lonely area. Despite this, the wilderness can be the place for a tremendous spiritual breakthrough. For John, the wilderness of Judea was his seminary, the mountains and skies were his sanctuary, locusts and honey his diet. And it was in this very desert that the "word of God" happened to John (Lk 3:2).

When the word of God comes to a person, it "happens," that is, it is an event. The Old Testament prophets begin their messages with the words, "The word of the LORD that came to Hosea," etc. The word translated "came" actually comes from the verb "to happen." The word of God is a happening! And it happens to those preparing to hear it as John was. Preparation for receiving the word of God implies spiritual rigor. Too often the word of God does not happen to us because we

are not disciplined enough to prepare for receiving it. In other words, we don't take God's word seriously enough to earnestly desire it and discipline ourselves to be open to it.

Listen to these words from Rudolf Bultmann:

God's word is not a general truth that can be stored in the treasure-house of human spiritual life. It remains his sovereign word which we shall never master and which can only be believed as an ever-living miracle, spoken by God, and constantly renewed. How should he who has heard it once not listen and hope, strive and pray, that he may hear it again? (*Existence and Faith*, p. 169)

*The word of God does not happen for our sakes alone. Solitude rightly used leads to service not selfishness.*

Has the word of God happened to you once? Did you think you could store that one event for future use? Are we not prone to forget that God's word can never be mastered or tucked away in some spiritual attic? We can never possess the word of God, but if we are fortunate God's word will possess us! So as Bultmann says, let us listen and hope, strive and pray, that we may hear the word of God afresh each day and that, in hearing, our spiritual deserts will be transformed into luscious gardens of spiritual vitality.

But this means spiritual discipline. It means a consistent seeking of the presence of God through meditation, prayer, and study. It also means being open to the voice of God in other people whom we know, for many insights from God come through our social contacts. I am not describing a sort of "works righteousness" here, as if to say we are saved by our devotional life. I am talking about the singleness of purpose which must accompany any worthwhile endeavor. If our financial incomes depended upon the amount of time most of us spend seeking the Lord, I'm afraid most of us would be bankrupt! As

in the business world, so in the spiritual realm: you reap what you sow; you get out of something only what you put into it. Earnestly seeking God in a disciplined way always pays off in the long run. As Jeremiah said long ago, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13).

John the Baptist symbolizes the disciplined spiritual life. His is the life of total devotion to the will and purpose of God. His vocation was his divinely appointed task and the rigor of his preparation for that task is an example to us all. But notice that John's spiritual discipline was not for the sake of "navel gazing." For when the word of God happened to John, he went into the world on his mission, "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Lk 3:3). When the word of God came, John went! There is no future in a self-centered devotional life. The word of God does not happen for our sakes alone. *Solitude rightly used leads to service not selfishness.* If we are primarily concerned about saving our own necks or escaping from duty, we are misunderstanding the meaning of spiritual rigor. The word of God happens so that we might be equipped to go and serve, not run and hide.

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### Revival

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John the Baptist came not to soothe but to stir up; he came not to applaud but to arouse. In this sense, he was in full harmony with the Old Testament prophets, for the prophetic spirit is a spirit that stirs and arouses complacent religion. God used John to revive Israel and prepare his people for their Lord. Preparation means arousal in light of a coming event. It means a reorganization of one's priorities and a restructuring of one's worldview. Preparation can mean a complete turn around in how a person lives his or her life. And this was the goal of John's ministry — to revive God's people, to turn their lives upside down so that they would be ready for the Coming One.

John chose to revive Israel through a stirring message of soon-coming judgment. You might say John struck a note of terror

into the people's hearts and shocked them into reformation. For John, the coming of the Messiah meant radical judgment — a judgment so severe that even the religious elite of Judaism were not immune. They too must repent and be baptized. Yet he held out the promise that those who reformed would be adequately prepared for what was to come. This was *revival through reformation.*

*Revival is obedient response to the stirring message of judgment and grace.*

At the heart of John's revival sermons was his warning against religious pride. It would do no good for the scribes and Pharisees to boast in their perfect pedigree ("Abraham is our father. . ."). No. What mattered was one's present attitude toward the coming judgment of God. Regardless of a person's "connections" with Abraham, each individual was to be judged on his or her response to God's "new" revelation which was about to take place in the Coming One. Being a Jew was not as important as being obedient.

How is it with us? When God revives us does he not often stir us up by confounding our settled opinions, attitudes or habits? When the prophetic spirit accosts us through either the written or spoken word, isn't our own self-understanding called into question? Suddenly, God's perspective breaks through the fog of our complacency, putting to shame the ungodly desires we cherish, the idols we love, the emptiness of our inner life, the pride which dominates us, the ambitions which enslave us, and our insensitivity to the needs of our society. Revival and reformation result from the Spirit's assault on personal ego, an assault which wounds only to heal and destroys only to build up again. Such revival can occur only when the laser beam of God's penetrating judgment cuts to the heart of our distorted self-understanding, simultaneously revealing the inadequacy of our



# GOOD NEWS FOR KIDS

## ON BUDGING, BENDING AND BURNING

Gillian Ford

There's a chapter in the Bible that teaches us not to budge, bend or burn. It's the story of Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and it's found in Daniel, chapter three.

King Nebuchadnezzar (we've called him Neb), decided that he'd set up a big statue in the plains of Dura — just for fun. You see he wanted to show how powerful he was, how he, the great king of the greatest nation of his day, could manipulate people into doing just what he wanted. A fisherman can catch a fish on a hook and then swing the line any way he wishes — that's manipulating and Neb liked doing it. "Yes," he thought. "Today, I'll have my jollies by making everyone bow down and worship my gold statue. I can just imagine the old men creaking with their squeaky joints and arthriticky knees as they try to bend down." And he laughed at the thought.

Now there were Jews living in Babylon at that time. You'll remember that they'd been naughty for many years and God had let their enemies capture them and take them away. While there were some of the captive Jews who were still faithful to God and still loved to obey his commandments, there weren't many. Only Daniel and his three friends did the right thing in the book of Daniel and at this time it seems Daniel was away governing his new province.

When the order came, the three men turned up

at the valley where the statue was, but when the call came over the loudspeaker to bow down, they wouldn't do it. And if you stand up in a valley with everyone else bowing down low, you sort of stand out. But they said to each other, "Oh, no. This we cannot do because we only serve the one true God and he doesn't like idols."

So that's how they didn't budge (they wouldn't move a muscle). And how they didn't bend (they wouldn't bow down). And in a bit we'll see they didn't burn either (which was very fortunate).

You'll remember from our last story that Nebuchadnezzar had a mean temper. If any of you have a two-year-old brother, you'll know the sort of thing I mean. Neb would jump up and down and almost froth at the mouth — not very kingly, but in those days, the king was like a god and could do what he liked.

Well, this day, Neb really lost his royal temper. He gnashed his teeth and bit his tongue and that made things even worse. "Throw them in the fiery furnace," he screamed. The fiery furnace was already mighty hot. You will have heard that there's red heat and white heat and white's the hottest. That furnace was as white as snow it was so hot. But Neb wasn't satisfied. "Hotter still," he shouted. "Make it four times hotter." Now that's hot.

Then his soldiers grabbed the three friends and





hustled them off to the mouth of the furnace. But it was so hot that as they pushed those men inside the flames, the soldiers themselves fell dead from the heat. The king didn't even bother to glance at them. Yet the next moment he lifted up his head six inches in surprise. His hands fell to his sides. It couldn't be, but it was. Those men were still alive. Neb poked his finger at them and began to count. "One, two, three...four!" he said. "Didn't we put only three in there? But I see four. And one is shiny bright like the son of God." His counselors agreed. "And see," he said, "their bonds are loosed."

Then Neb called them out of the fire. "Quite amazing," he said very quietly. "Not even a hair of their heads is touched...their coats are not burned — (sniff, sniff) — they don't even smell of burning. Only the cords that tied them are burnt."

And so he changed his royal mind, which kings of Babylon **never** did. But none of his predecessors had seen anything like this. What else could Neb do but reverse his decision and send out a decree (a little bit like putting over a message from the president on national television). He told everyone to respect the God of these men. If they didn't, they'd be killed," he said. "For no other god can deliver like these men's God."

So that's the story. Well, what does it mean to you? I know you're not in Babylon. I know you've never met King Neb. I know you've never been to the plains of Dura in the kingdom of Babylon. But I'm sure you've been asked to bow down to idols. No, I don't mean an idol like that statue. Instead, the kids at school may try to get you to do things that are wrong. Sometimes they may try to get you to smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol or even take street drugs. But these and many other things that you face from day-to-day are really idols in disguise. You see, an idol is anything that you worship, that takes the love, the time and the devotion that you are supposed to give to God.

Jesus told his disciples, "Seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness and everything else will fall into place." So what is it that we are to look for? First we need the righteousness of Jesus. We need his wonderful life and deeds to take the place of our poor life and deeds. And we need his death to pay the price of our sins. When you accept Jesus, God looks at you as though Jesus was standing right in front of you. And God sees Jesus instead of you. He accepts you as his child for the sake of Jesus.

And when you love Jesus you become a member of his kingdom. And that means you will accept Jesus as Lord of your life and obey the principles of love of his kingdom.

Now if Jesus had been standing in the plain of Dura back there in Babylon, it would have been fine to bow your heads to him. You see, Jesus is God and it's right to worship him for he made us and loves us, and he wants us to give him the right place in our lives.

That means that when other things come into my life to steal my life and affections, I have to ask myself, "Can I bow my head to this thing or this person and still bow my head to Jesus?" The answer is often "probably not."

It may help to remember that where there's a false idol, there's always a furnace. When you don't give into the idol the furnace rarely burns you, but if you **do** worship false idols you'll always get burned. Some people love to smoke cigarettes. "It relaxes me," they say, "and life is so stressful." The furnace can take a long time to come, but they will enter the furnace of sickness with high blood pressure, heart disease, poor circulation and even lung cancer. And they'll smell awful all the time!

Alcohol is another popular idol. Many people bow to it, loving it more than God, life and family — but it has a bitter, fiery furnace. It takes away self-control, makes people silly or violent, causes many, many car accidents and damages the body dreadfully. It's a terrible furnace that will burn and destroy other innocent people besides the drinker. How many miserable families there are because of alcohol.

And street drugs are similar — they'll make you sick and they especially attack the mind. They can make you angry and fightsy and crazy, ruin your family and take away your health.

These are all terrible idols and it's easy for anyone with sense to see that. But anything, even good things, even little things, can become an idol and ruin your life by taking your attention away from Jesus.

So, if you bow, bow to Jesus. And ask him to make you unbudgely and unbendly — that means stubborn to do what's right and unwilling to bow your head to anyone or anything but him. Remember those brave boys who would rather have burned (they didn't know they wouldn't) than have bowed. And remember, the only thing they lost was their bonds.

ways and the surpassing richness of God's ways.

Despite the enthusiastic responses to his ministry, John never forgot that he was merely a pointer — pointing people away from himself to the Coming One. There was no confusion in John's mind between the messenger and the message. Even though John's disciples wanted to make John the message — the "good news" — John refused. He would not compete with the Coming One.

Not every messenger is able to play "second fiddle" to the message. Human ambition is so subtle and powerful that very often messengers become the center of attraction rather than the message. But we are not the good news! Jesus Christ is the good news! We are pointers, pointing others to Christ, not stealing the show. John never lost sight of the Coming One. That is why he could steer a steady course despite the skewed ambitions of his fans. John knew the moment one's eyes move from Christ to self there is the danger that this individual will play Messiah. This can happen also on a larger scale with religious institutions which are interested primarily in promoting and perpetuating themselves. Loyalty to the institution is equated with loyalty to Christ when, in fact, they really have very little in common.

Let us remember that every true revival is due to a renewed focus upon Christ alone. The prophetic spirit calls us away from inordinate loyalty to the messenger and toward ultimate loyalty to the message itself — Christ. We must look beyond the messenger to the message of Christ. Further, the prophetic spirit calls into question our settled self-understanding, our priorities, values, affections, ambitions and dreams. No area of life remains hidden in the closet. All is exposed to the searching judgment of God. Revival is obedient response to the stirring message of judgment and grace.

## Resignation

I began Part One of this article by reflecting on John's imprisonment and death. I suggested that John died a bit confused over the bleak turn of events. Jesus made no attempt to intervene; he simply allowed circumstances to run their course and eventually John was executed. Then afterward, Jesus commended John to the crowds, calling him the greatest of the prophets. How nice of Jesus to do this, but such strokes did little for John who was already dead.

I can't explain the death of John the Baptist from an ethical point of view. Theologically, sure, one could say that John had served his purpose and it was time for him to leave the stage. But couldn't he have retired to a cottage on the Sea of Galilee? Why did he have to die the way he did?

*Mature faith is not based on miraculous interventions from above. It is based on the simple conviction that regardless of external circumstances, God is and always will be.*

The death of John the Baptist represents the continuing hostilities being waged between the forces of good and evil. John, the prophet of God, spoke the word of God in a powerful and persuasive way. And when this word encountered hard hearts, resistance and persecution resulted. John was beheaded by a man who was too weak to face the truth about himself, a man who could not bear to have his self-understanding blown to bits by the truth of God. When the message is too much for us to take, the messenger usually catches it in the neck. And don't we sometimes prefer a lie to the truth about ourselves? John symbolizes those messengers who refuse to patronize our

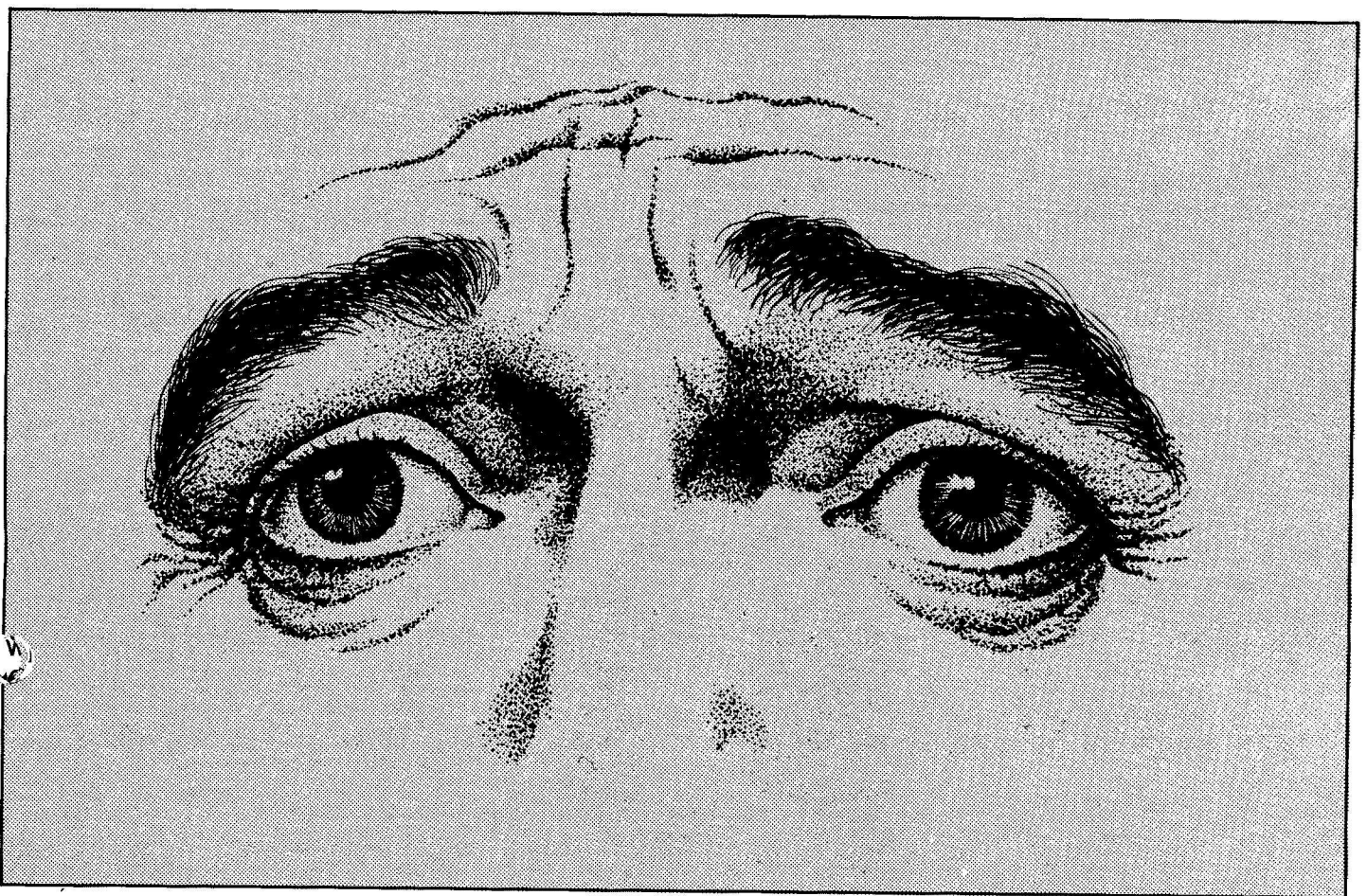
deceptions, even at the risk of death. Having done the job, having spoken the word, the messenger resigns himself or herself to whatever fate may come to pass.

Perhaps the best word to describe John's end is resignation. In the death of John the Baptist we learn that not all heroes live happily ever after, not all good guys live to see their cause triumph, not all prayers for intervention are answered. The facts are that good people die senselessly and God chooses not to intervene. No angel's hand stops the ax from falling despite our most fervent prayers.

Resignation is the rest of soul which takes place when a person is at peace with God. Faith in God does not protect us from senseless tragedies or cruel reversals. Even though I believe in God, my daughter may still be hit by a car or my wife killed in an accident or I might die of cancer. I am only fooling myself if I think that my faith in God will shield me from every trauma of life. John the Baptist lost his head, and he was a prophet! Where does that leave me?

Resignation is not a helpless giving up in the face of insurmountable odds. It is a daring affirmation of trust in a God who, despite the darkness of present circumstances, will bring order out of chaos and meaning out of madness. Mature faith is not based on miraculous interventions from above. It is based on the simple conviction that regardless of external circumstances, *God is and always will be*. Therefore, resignation is not weakness but decision to commit the terrifying mysteries of life to a God who is above all yet in all. Resignation is rest in the bosom of the Divine even though our trials lay us to rest in the bosom of the earth. It is based on the conviction that God will have the last word. Indeed, in Jesus Christ God has already spoken his last word!





## THE MALE MID-LIFE CRISIS

by Desmond Ford

**L**ife is never easy, and although we may think everyone around us is intensely successful and happy, we don't see the whole picture. No person in the world is perfectly content. No one is ever free of problems.

When a child misbehaves we often say, "Oh, it's just a stage he's passing through." Similarly, many of our own problems arise because we're passing through some stage of personal development.

Our lives can be divided into various stages. These periods have been called the testing teens, the teachable twenties, the terrific thirties, the fiery forties, the forceful fifties, the serious sixties, the sacred seventies, and the aching eighties. When you're young you are sure that life gets better as you get older. But when you're older you are sure that youth was sheer heaven. I've often said we should aim to die young as late as possible!

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### Men in Crisis

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This article focuses on the specific problem which multitudes of men face at middle age. Professional counselors call it the "mid-life crisis." What is it? The tragedy begins with doubts about one's self, one's wife, one's family, one's job, about God and destiny. For people under thirty it's a myth. For people over fifty it's often a memory. But for men in their mid-thirties and forties it certainly is a reality.

While there's no such thing as a male menopause, there is a crisis between thirty-five and fifty for a large proportion of men. A Christian psychiatrist reading the story of David and Bathsheba would have diagnosed his problem as a mid-life crisis.

Biographies are full of examples of this middle-age madness. Charles Dickens in his forties took a nineteen-year-old mistress and

behaved quite out of character. According to some versions of Shakespeare's life, he retired from marital sex before he was forty-five and from work at forty-six. What is definite is that he wrote two plays in which he pictured middle-aged men experiencing sudden transformations of character and life with the result of ruin. The painter Gauguin left his family and a good job to live in the South Seas in his middle years. Dr. Daniel J. Levinson has told us "Men such as Freud, Jung, Eugene O'Neill, Frank Lloyd Wright, Goya, and Gandhi, went through a profound crisis around forty, and made themselves creative geniuses through it." Then there are others including Sinclair Lewis and Dylan Thomas who were destroyed by their crises.

Dr. James Dobson, in his book *Straight Talk to Men*, has given good counsel on the mid-life crisis. He quotes the findings of three studies involving more than two

thousand people which concluded that eighty percent of the executives between thirty-four and forty-two years of age went through a mid-life trauma. Dobson says these conclusions agree with his own observations and particularly stresses that the problem comes chiefly to those who are highly motivated and successful professional men.

Another writer who has written at length on the topic is Jim Conway. See his volume *Men in Mid-life Crisis*. Conway is a Christian minister who went through a nightmare of his own but survived.

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### Defining the Crisis

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Dr. Dobson's two radio programs on the topic of the male mid-life crisis produced an avalanche of mail and phone calls. Obviously Dobson was scratching where people itched! But can we define this middle-age dilemma? Dobson says:

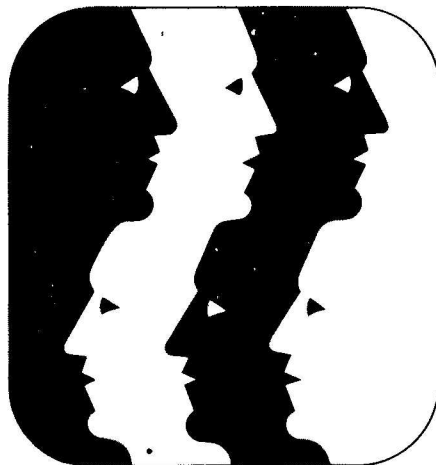
It's a time of intense personal evaluation when frightening and disturbing thoughts surge through the mind, posing questions about who I am and why I'm here and what's it all about. It's a period of self-doubt and disenchantment with everything familiar and stable. It represents terrifying thoughts that can't be admitted or revealed even to those closest to us. These anxieties often produce an uncomfortable separation between loved ones at a time when support and understanding are desperately needed. (*Straight Talk to Men*, p. 174)

Dr. Conway tells us that the four major enemies threatening a man in his middle years are his own body, his work, his family, and God. It doesn't take much imagination for those of us who are over thirty-five to fill in the spaces. Someone has joked that the five B's of being fifty are broad, bald, bifocals, bunions and bad breath. It's not that bad at thirty-five but some of the symptoms do begin not long after.

Men in their forties find they no longer have the stamina they once had. About one-third of people in this decade have incurable diseases, but not

necessarily fatal ones. A man suspects that his male attractiveness is declining rapidly. Keep in mind that even Mohammed Ali retired at thirty-seven. For many men the first hint of heart trouble comes in the middle decades and males become aware of the time bombs ticking within their own chests.

As for one's work, the realization usually dawns that the original ambitions are never going to be fulfilled. Many a man becomes resentful and feels trapped. But money must be made and so the job must be kept. It's hard not to become emotional in such a situation. One longs for escape and for variety and too often one is drawn into infidelity.



Infidelity promises but never delivers. It promises to prove to a man that he is still virile, lovable, and attractive. It promises him brightness, variety and joy. But he's cheated on all counts. Such ventures only result in ultimate disillusionment and heartache. Only those who believe that God is a God of love and that all his commandments are loving warnings against self-destruction find safety in the storms of temptation.

It's not hard to fill in the problems that exist in family life for a middle-aged man. At this point of time the demand on his economic productivity is increasing. The children need much more money than in earlier years. His wife may be taking him for granted. Perhaps he even has his parents to care for. No wonder he's tempted to run. If home is always a place of burdens rather than of joys and privileges he will regret his marriage. If his wife is

unaware that most men enjoy being mothered to a considerable degree she may lose her husband. And if he falls into the old trap of forgetting that "possession brings indifference" and that the furthest fields only seem to be greener, he's heading for destruction. As the manna of old when used otherwise than God directed turned to worms, so it is with all the pleasures of the senses when used in any other way than in harmony with the law of God.

And then there's a man's problems with God. Poor God! He gets the blame for just about everything. Surely he is the most long-suffering person in the universe. The very reason for our sensitivity to the ills of life is because life, despite its constant problems, is still chiefly good. Most of us have more joy than sorrow, more health than sickness. Quite irrationally we think we deserve and are entitled to a smooth flowing existence encrusted with gems and surrounded by strawberries. The real fact of course is that if we got our deserts they would be hell.

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### The Spiritual Factor

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Perhaps the underlying cause of the male mid-life crisis is spiritual. If a man already has his eye on eternity rather than time, God rather than man, the service of others rather than the service of himself, the crisis either will never approach him or, should it threaten, will never bear fruit.

The religion of too many of us is a thing of culture rather than of Christ. It is so easy to attend church regularly and yet be controlled by worldly values. The workaholic, the lover of pleasure, the overambitious personality, has not yet found the gospel. The problem of mortality should have been met and defeated long ago. Whoever is not in Christ by a living, abiding faith is dead already. But whoever trusts solely in the merits of the Savior already has the treasure of eternal life (see Jn 5:24).

And as for one's work, the Christian man is more concerned with being faithful than being obviously successful. He can afford to leave the results with God. As a Christian, his work



ideally is something that ministers to the well-being of others and if so it brings its own reward. It is only the idolator that turns his work into a god and expects it to give him his heaven here and now.

The Christian man has advantages regarding his family also. He doesn't expect perfection in his wife or his children because he can't offer it to them. He knows God has forgiven his sins and therefore he has to be in the same business himself and he will have plenty of call for it. He should know with Martin Luther that "marriage is a school for character." Only idealistic unmarried persons think that marriage is pure heaven. True, monogamy becomes monotony to the man who thinks all life can be turned into a picnic. But the Christian will thank God for the privilege of sharing his hopes and joys and cares and obligations with another human being who like him seeks to make Christ first and best and last in everything.

The Christian remembers that life will only work one way —

God's way. That way is summed up in the book of Romans, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the examples of Christ, Paul and the other worthies of Scripture. It is a way that's God-centered rather than self-centered. It's more concerned with giving than taking. It puts its stress on today rather than regrets for the past or anxiety about tomorrow. It means faith rather than sight, spirit rather than flesh, others rather than self.

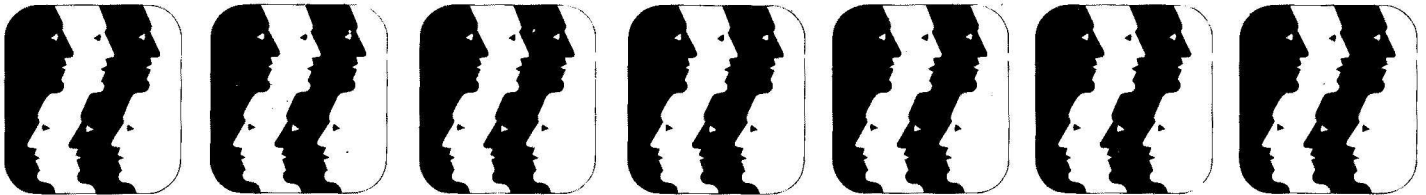
*Only those who believe that God is a God of love and that all his commandments are loving warnings against self-destruction find safety in the storms of temptation.*

It has to be frankly faced that we all by nature are fools. This is why God has given us some guiding rules for living. The

guidelines from Sinai suggest that we must learn to put first things first and God is first. Next comes family, thirdly other people, and last things. Those who reverse the order are heading not only for a mid-life crisis but a mid-life crack-up.

The iron band around all of life is death. Plato said that philosophy was nothing other than the study of dying and death. When the Christian man has this problem licked he has the sword wherewith to behead all other problems. In Christ he has life eternal whatever happens to this earthly life. In Christ is his chief good, whatever happens to his other goods. In Christ alone there is hope. When Paul said "For to me, to live is Christ" he was not just setting forth a worthy ideal but a rich reality open to all of us.

Greet every day with both "Amen" and "Hallelujah," with the "So be it" of submission and the "Praise the Lord" of faith and hope. Then every crisis, not just the one in the midst of one's years, will issue in victory.



## STAGES IN AN ADULT MALE'S LIFE

- Stage 1 — Entry into the adult world (early 20's)
- Stage 2 — Settling down (early 30's)
- Stage 3 — Becoming one's own man (late 30's)
- Stage 4 — The mid-life crisis (about 40)
- Stage 5 — Restabilization and the end of the mid-life decade (following the crisis of the 40's)



## GNU ON THE MOVE

**D**r. Desmond Ford, Noel Mason, and Brad McIntyre are weekend wanderers as they continue to conduct gospel meetings in various parts of the USA.

The GNU team was in full force in Washington D.C. on May 17-19. An encouraging number of people attended the meetings which were held at the Owen Brown Interfaith Center in Columbia, MD.

On June 1 Noel and Brad addressed Adventist issues at the Anaheim-Sheraton Hotel in Anaheim, CA. Noel spoke on "Jesus and the Date-setters" while Brad focused on "Confidence on Judgment Day." An engaging question/answer period followed. Of course, for Brad's little girl, the highlight of the weekend was a visit to Disneyland the day before the meetings!

Dr. Ford, Noel, and Brad combined again for an intense but rewarding weekend in Orlando, FL. on June 7-9. Concentrating especially on prophecy, the Investigative Judgment, and Christ's high-priestly ministry, the meetings were designed to provide biblical alternatives to Adventism's traditional teaching on the sanctuary.

During the week of June 10-15 Dr. Ford was guest speaker at the Church of God Seventh-day Seminary in Denver, CO. A few of his topics were "The Gospel and the Old Testament," "The Gospel and the Sabbath," and "The Gospel and Ethics."

Future meetings are scheduled for Angwin and Fresno, CA. respectively. Then it's Congress time again! We hope to see many of you either in Solvang or Chattanooga.

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Do something nice for your friend.

# Wrestling with the Word

by Brad McIntyre

*Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned — sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come*

(Rom 5:12-14).

This passage is a real brain-twister. Paul has just ended an exciting section in which he lists the benefits of Christ's atoning work (5:1-11). The gist of his message is that all who believe are justified, reconciled and rejoice in a new relationship with God.

In Romans 5:12-21 Paul describes the twin themes of cosmic disaster through Adam and universal grace and righteousness through Jesus Christ — the second Adam. Adam blew it for us but Christ won it back again. Just as we were all lost when Adam sinned, we were all justified (acquitted) through Christ's perfect obedience in our behalf (vv. 18-19). So in this section of Romans the reign of Christ confronts and conquers the reign of sin and death initiated by Adam. The history of the first Adam is overcome by the history

of the second Adam.

Now let's look at our key verses. "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin . . ." Some interpreters think Paul is discussing original sin. He is not. He is making one simple point: the regime of the first Adam brought death — universal death. Notice the phrases "death through sin," "death spread to all men," "death reigned . . ." Death, death, death. Paul's main point is that Adam brought only death but Christ brings life. Therefore, it is necessary for every person to transfer from the age of the old Adam into the age of the new Adam! This life-producing shift comes by faith. Woe unto the person who enters the final judgment having the first Adam as his or her representative! Such an individual is indeed behind the times — literally.

But what about verse 13: "sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law." Here we'll have to take Paul on his own terms as far as the law is concerned. In this passage Paul has Sinai in view. For him, the law came at Sinai. Yes, sin certainly existed before Sinai, but because there was no written code to nail it down, sin could not be recorded as transgression of the law in the technical sense. *Death*, however, still reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sin was not like Adam's transgression.

What was so unique about Adam's transgression? It is helpful to notice that in verse 14 Paul distinguishes between "sin" and "transgression." By sin (Gk. *hamartia*) he means an inward disposition of rebellion against God and exaltation of self, an inbred defiance of divine authority. This sorry state of affairs existed long before Sinai. It was the lot of every descendant of Adam and thus death "spread to all men."

Transgression (Gk. *parabasis*), on the other hand, refers to specific wicked actions in violation of some known commandment. To transgress is to intentionally

overstep a moral boundary. Adam transgressed a specific command: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen 2:17). By eating, Adam became the first transgressor; his was a voluntary, responsible and guilty infraction of a known command. In this regard then, Paul says Adam's transgression was unique in comparison to the sins of those who lived in the era before Sinai.

What do these things imply? First, the law turns generic sin into specific transgression (cf. Rom 4:15; 5:21; Gal 3:19). Sin can't be classified as transgression without help from the law. Nevertheless, *death still reigned* even before Sinai. These words keep coming with relentless power. Death marched ahead under its own power without any aid from the law. And death dominated those whose sin (*hamartia*) was not at all similar to Adam's transgression (*parabasis*)!

But the main point of this passage is not some novel theory about the relationship of sin to the written law nor is Paul trying to split hairs over when sin becomes transgression. Death is the subject. And death is universal and unrelenting as long as a person remains "in Adam." Paul wants us to realize that "Adam" is not merely a figure from the ancient past but a mode of existence. To be "in Adam" is to be locked in a no-exit situation with the macabre silhouette of death on the horizon.

Finally, Paul says Adam was a type of Christ. In what way? Certainly not in his sin! But probably in that Adam represented all humankind and when he sinned we all sinned in him. But the corporate nature of damnation is more than offset by the corporate nature of salvation. Christ is the second Adam and represents all humankind just as the first Adam. Only now Christ triumphs where Adam failed. When Christ obeyed we all obeyed in him; when he died we all died; when he rose from the tomb we all rose with him and now reign with him in heavenly places.



# GOOD NEWS FOR ADVENTISTS

The presentation of the Gospel is the primary task of Good News Unlimited. In a specific and limited departure from what GNU normally does, Desmond Ford, Brad McIntyre and Noel Mason critique the traditional Adventist doctrine of the Investigative Judgement. 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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