

Born to Win

A God Forgotten

by Ronald L. Dart

What do you do when you cut loose from God? How do you live? What guides your decisions? How can you tell right from wrong? And, when you think about it, who *consciously* ever cuts loose from God? Does anyone say, “I don’t care about God. I’m going to *dump* him.” Ah, maybe, but those are generally out on the fringe somewhere. Let me show you a more pertinent example of how it might happen. It’s in Moses’ last sermon to Israel. I’ll read from Deuteronomy 4, verse 5:

Deuteronomy 4

NIV '84

⁵ See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it.

⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”

Now, I want you to think about that just for a moment. “People are going to look at you, watch you living the life, watch you making your decisions on the basis of the law I’m giving you. They’re going to look at you and say, ‘Wow! This is a *great* nation. They are a wise and understanding people.’”

Deuteronomy 4

NIV '84

⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?

⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

⁹ Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

“Don’t let them slip away.” Do you have any idea of how the ideas (that as, the laws that Moses is talking about) were worked into the founding of this country? We were to be a nation of *laws*—under the rule of law, not the rule of a king. And don’t kid yourself, the law of Moses underlay everything we built in this country. We just didn’t *say* so. Moses was not cited, but anyone who has studied both Moses and American law *knows* the connection that is there. In many ways, what Moses revealed to Israel was a manifestation of *natural law*. (And that’s what I think the founders of *this* country tended to call it.)

Now, we have forgotten and we have not instilled this love of law into our children. We now need to turn to the question: What is the alternative to the rule of law? Clear back in the 17th century, a gentleman named Samuel Rutherford wrote a book titled *Lex, Rex*. It’s Latin; it means “the Law, the

King”. His argument against *Rex, Lex* was based on Deuteronomy 17, and it supported the rule of law rather than the rule by men. His philosophy laid the foundation for guys like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and thus for the American system of a *social contract* based on *separation of powers*.

Now, here’s the burning question: If you don’t have *Lex, Rex* (in other words, the law is king), what’s the alternative? Simple, you have its opposite—*Rex, Lex*—the *King*, the Law. After the English restoration, the authorities *burned* Rutherford’s book, and they cited Rutherford for high treason. He died in his own good time, before they carried out the sentence. But it’s really something to realize that, when they restored the monarchy, they cited him for high treason (I don’t think he ever got to trial) and *burned his book*.

Do you think it’s possible, that if our nation is no longer ruled by law, that we might be ruled by a dictator or a king or an emperor? “Nah, that could happen here, surely.” But why not? It happened in Israel. It happened to Italy, it happened in Germany in the last century. What makes *us* so special? If we grow weary—we get tired and we want a government that will just *take care of us*—we, even we the American people with our Bill of Rights, might *just be happy* to have a dictator. Bad idea? Oh, yes. But we wouldn’t be the first country in history to roll over before a tyrant. I will tell you, in no uncertain terms, that I am *terrified* at the possibility of any kind of dictatorship. But we may have, as a country, grown old and tired and we are simply unwilling to continue to pay the price of liberty.

I did another program not long ago titled *How Freedom Is Lost*, and in a moment we’ll tell you how to get a free copy of the program. But before I do, I want to underline something we just read. Moses said:

Deuteronomy 4

NIV '84

⁹ Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Teach them to *your children and your grandchildren*. Sometimes it is worth looking more carefully at the words people use to try to understand what they are telling us. The Hebrew word, for example, rendered “to forget” is a case in point. Not that “forget” is a bad translation, but *any* translation is at risk of losing meaning. The Hebrew verb [*shâkach*, שָׁכַח, Strong’s H7911] (which I won’t try to pronounce) is a primary root which means “to mislay”, as in “I mislaid my car keys. I have forgotten where I put them.” We forget things that are merely unimportant to remember. We *mislay* things out of carelessness or inattentiveness. I was thinking about something else, and I wasn’t paying any attention to where I put my car keys, and so I have mislaid them. He says, “Watch yourself closely so you don’t forget these things or let them slip from your heart. Teach them to your kids and your grandkids.” What has God offered to help us with this? Well, quite a lot, actually. Take, for example, the Ten Commandments—Exodus 20, verse eight:

Exodus 20

AKJV

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

⁹ Six days shall you labor, and do all your work:

¹⁰ But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates:

¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: why the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

That, in taking the day off from work once a week, we are *not merely* sleeping in in the morning and being lazy in the afternoon. We are in solidarity with God. We are going along with his pattern. We are *remembering* him. *Forgetting* is passive, careless, and inattentive. *Remembering* is active, careful, attentive. For some reason, Christians seem to dismiss their religious rights and formalities and then they wonder where their morality went. Well, they mislaid it. But in addition to the Sabbath, God handed down a set of holy days. The purpose of them was that we might *remember the important things*. For the Jews, the holidays kept them in remembrance of important interventions of God in their history.

But a funny thing happened along the way. It turns out that what we thought were Jewish holidays were, in fact, as much about Christ and his work as it ever was about anything Jewish. I won't walk through all the holy days here and now. They are covered in detail, along with their Christian significance, in a book—*The Thread: God's Appointments with History*. (It's available from our offices; available from Amazon.) Suffice it for now to say that these days are for *remembering*, lest we forget. For if you are not careful, attentive, and active, you *will* forget.

A natural result of forgetting God is what intellectuals call *relativism*. Relativism is an intellectual's word for a people who no longer know right from wrong, or who no longer have an objective basis for discerning right from wrong. Each of us has his own narrative—his own story—and in that narrative we are the *sole arbiters* of right and wrong. “This is my truth; it may not be your truth.”

Now, how do we get to that place? Well, we get there by mislaying God and his Word. Ann Coulter had a word for it in a title of one of her recent books—*Godless*. And, in truth, we have left the door *wide open* for the creation of a *godless* society. I didn't read that book because I hardly felt I needed to. I could see the truth about an increasingly godless society *all around me*. And I'm certain that Ann probably illustrated it again and again. But I just happened to pick up a back issue of *First Things* and came upon an article entitled *A Campaign of Narratives* by George Weigel. Starting out with the 2008 election campaigns, he widens out for a very broad view of our society—where we are and where we may be going. It was this paragraph that stopped me in my tracks and made me think about this.

In Europe, this epistemological skepticism has brought several countries and the European Union itself perilously close to what a distinguished European intellectual once described as the “dictatorship of relativism”: the imposition of relativism by coercive state power. Perhaps the most notable example is contemporary Spain, where, in this year of grace 2009, Juan can walk into his local civil-registry office, declare himself “Juanita,” and have his national identity card changed accordingly, without any surgical folderol. Human nature is what my narrative declares it to be.

George Weigel - A Campaign of Narratives

But what made *my* blood run cold when I read this was the realization that we may be closer today to a dictatorship of relativism than when this was written in March of 2009. (By the way, that “distinguished European intellectual” Weigel was talking about then was Cardinal Ratzinger—his last sermon as a cardinal—who is now Pope Benedict xvi.) Weigel went on to say:

Yet it is also true that the 2008 campaign, which actually began in the late fall of 2006, was a disturbing one—not because it coincided with what is usually described in the hyperbole of our day as “the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression” but because of how it revealed some serious flaws in our political culture. Prominent among those flaws is our seeming inability to discuss, publicly, the transformation of American liberalism into an amalgam of

lifestyle libertinism, moral relativism, and soft multilateralism, all flavored by the identity politics of race and gender. Why can't we talk sensibly about these things?

George Weigel - A Campaign of Narratives

Why, indeed? Because there doesn't seem to be very much sensible talk these days about *anything*. No one explains anything. All we get are sound-bites and talking points. This is not debate; it is mere *wrangling*. But I guess that's a good description for precisely where we are.

While I was following the bread crumbs of this line of thought, I came across a *startling* piece by Jonathan Rosenblum writing for Jewish World Review. (By the way, if you want the sources and links to the things I mention in my programs, they will be posted at our website. It isn't to spell out websites on the radio, and you probably wouldn't get it anyway. Also a disclaimer: I am not Jewish, not Catholic. I am a generic Christian. One pastor emailed me and called me a "maverick". I looked it up. A maverick is "an unbranded range animal". So I decided I could wear that label without embarrassment, as I am indeed unbranded.) Anyway, back to Rosenblum:

That the cult of the expert [*Oh, I love that expression—the cult of the expert.*] — itself an outgrowth of the Enlightenment's enthroning of human reason above all — should appeal to intellectual elites is unsurprising: It is a form of the revenge of the nerds whose superior qualities were unnoted by the pretty girls in high school. The assumption that "rationality" is a matter easily ascertained, at least by the brainy folks, underlies the preference for centrally planned economies by many intellectuals. Free markets are deemed too unruly, too irrational, as they give equal weight to the decisions of millions of consumers, those with high IQs and low IQs alike.

Jonathan Rosenblum - Repentance for a Misspent Youth

Of course, freedom itself is *awfully unruly*. It is a *burden* to bear. But in the mind of God, freedom makes it possible for a man to relate to God without an intermediary. Rosenblum was writing about the work of one Isaiah Berlin, and he said this:

An important strand in Berlin's work was the demonstration of how the Enlightenment project of making human reason the measure of all things could end in the Gulag. The anti-clericalism of the leading Enlightenment thinkers contained within it the potential for a new clericalism more authoritarian and murderous than that which it superseded, with intellectuals as its priests.

Jonathan Rosenblum - Repentance for a Misspent Youth

That's a *shocking* statement. Let me define a couple of things. One: anti-clericalism is:

[...] a historical movement that opposes religious institutional power and influence, real or alleged, in all aspects of public and political life, and the involvement of religion in the everyday life of the citizen. It suggests a more active and partisan role than mere *laïcité*, and has at times been violent, leading to attacks and seizure of church property.

José Mariano Sánchez - Anticlericalism: A Brief History

That's *very* interesting. Do you suppose we have a press, in their educational system, that have been influenced by this anti-clerical philosophy? We have come to this place simply because we've forgotten God. *We*, the ordinary man, have mislaid him, and as a consequence we are *vulnerable* to charlatans and idiots. You may want to watch for remnants of the old anti-clericalism in today's political administration as efforts are made to reduce the influence of religion in the everyday life of the citizen.

I want to reiterate something because it is vitally important for us to understand. When Rosenblum said, "[t]he anti-clericalism of the leading Enlightenment thinkers contained within it the potential for a new clericalism more authoritarian and murderous than that which it superseded, with intellectuals as its priests."...you see, these people tend to think that they just *know* so much more than we do; they are so much more *rational* than we are; so much more *intelligent* than the rest of us are—that *they know* what is right and what is best for us *regardless of what we think about it*. And as a consequence, we may wind up with tyranny in a way that we didn't expect it, and from sources from which we never would have imagined it.

In then last speech of Moses I referenced earlier, he spoke a little bit about the danger of the years to come. In Deuteronomy 8, verse 11, he said:

Deuteronomy 8

AKJV

¹¹ Beware that you forget not the LORD your God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command you this day:

I guess we don't realize that one of the ways in which we don't *forget God* is by hanging on to his commandments, his judgments, and his statutes. I mean, they're there for a reason; we're supposed to use them to remember him. He said, "Do this carefully":

Deuteronomy 8

AKJV

¹² Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and dwelled therein;

¹³ And when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied;

My word! What a description of the United States of America in the last decade. Not so much, perhaps, right now today. But we got to where we thought we were the richest society in the history of mankind, and we didn't *realize* that it was built like a house of cards. He said, "Now, watch out that you don't forget the LORD your God when all this wonderful stuff happens":

Deuteronomy 8

AKJV

¹⁴ Then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage[.]

Yeah, it *is* something we forget. We forget where we were; we forget our roots; we forget how much we had to fight for; we forget the sacrifices that have been made again and again and again—not only for our own liberty, but for the liberty of France, and England, and Germany, and Europe in general, and other parts of the world where we have gone in and *fought* to protect even Muslim societies from people who are trying to destroy them. Now, all this has consequences. One of the psalms, Psalm 50, verse 16:

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹⁶ But to the wicked God said, What have you to do to declare my statutes, or that you should take my covenant in your mouth? [*Why are you even opening your mouth about me?*]

¹⁷ Seeing you hate instruction, and casts my words behind you.

Oh I'm afraid, folks, I'm afraid that even a lot of us who name the name of Christ—who call ourselves “Christian”—aren't that happy about being instructed. Because, you know, the word *Torah* means instruction. It is to teach us, not to control us. It's not *handcuffs*; it's an explanation of the *morals of God*. And are *we* going to be among those who cast his words behind us? He gives us an illustration.

Psalm 50

AKJV

¹⁸ When you saw a thief, then you consented with him, and have been partaker with adulterers.

¹⁹ You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit.

²⁰ You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son.

²¹ These things have you done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was altogether such an one as yourself: [*You thought I was just like you are.*] but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes.

Do you realize what he just said? All this slander, all the theft, all the lying, and all this stuff, and he says, “I'm going to reprove you and I'm going to *set them in order in front of your eyes*.” You think somehow that, as Christians who ignore the teachings of Christ in too many areas, and who ignore that upon which the teachings of Christ were based—the law and the prophets—if we ignore all that and put it all behind us, do you think that we're going to escape it?

Psalm 50

AKJV

²² Now consider this, you that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.

²³ Whoever offers praise glorifies me: and to him that orders his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God.

I think God is speaking metaphorically here. I don't think he has to lift a finger. We will tear ourselves to pieces, soon enough, without any help from anywhere. There are signs that we're getting there about now.

Jeremiah was a man who, in the latter stages of Israel's decline, was sent down to the city gate, day after day, to preach. And he said to them in Jeremiah 2, verse 31:

Jeremiah 2

NIV

³¹ “You of this generation, consider the word of the LORD:

“Have I been a desert to Israel
or a land of great darkness? [*Have I been bad to you somehow?*]

Why do my people say, ‘We are free to roam;
we will come to you no more’?

³² Does a maiden forget her jewelry,
a bride her wedding ornaments?

Yet my people have forgotten me,
days without number.”

“Forgotten” is a good word for it but, again, the Hebrew suggests “mislaïd”. You lose something because you weren’t *paying attention to what you were doing*. In a very real sense, we have simply *lost God*—mislaïd him. For some, it’s been an outright rejection. For others, we’ve just neglected him out of our conscience. We lost him because we were inattentive, we were careless, we were passive. Later Jeremiah will say:

Jeremiah 3

NIV

²¹ A cry is heard on the barren heights,
the weeping and pleading of the people of Israel,
because they have perverted their ways
and have forgotten the Lord their God.

Perverted our ways? Yeah, relativism. We have created a narrative—a story we live that we write for ourselves. The word here for “perverted” is “to crook” [‘âvâh, הָפַךְ, Strong’s H5753a]. We have bent our story like an old coat hanger that we have shaped to suit us.

Until next time.

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ID: 09AGF