



ZWTF

Sunday, January 19, 2014 Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

ROMANS Part 13

Chapter 2:17-23



Romans 2:17-23

Lo! you are being denominated a Jew, and are resting on law, and are boasting in God, and know the will, and are testing what things are of consequence, being instructed out of the law. Besides, you have confidence in yourself to be a guide of the blind, a light of those in darkness, a discipliner of the imprudent, a teacher of minors, having the form of knowledge and the truth in the law.

You, then, who are teaching another, you are not teaching yourself! who are heralding not to be stealing, you are stealing! who are saying not to be committing adultery, you are committing adultery! who are abominating idols, you are despoiling the sanctuary! who are boasting in a law, through the transgression of the law you are dishonoring God!

Here is one heck of a denomination: “You are being denominated a Jew.” The word “denomination,” itself, is generic. It means simply the act of naming or designating a person or thing. One of the most esteemed denominations in the world

is, “Jew.” Now it has nearly become a racial slur. It is true that the denominates made one of the biggest mistakes in human history, but that is no reason to hate them. Question their judgment, yes. Doubt their spirituality—I’m totally on-board with that. Hate them? No. It is all the more reason to love them. Without them being the world’s most amazing spiritual screw-ups, we would never have been introduced to the deepest heart of God. As Paul says in Romans 11:28, “As to the evangel, indeed, they are enemies because of you.” In other words, God locked up Israel in stubbornness,

temporarily shelving them so that the new message of transcendent grace could then be published among the nations. Such a boon could occur only on the heels of Israelite apostasy. Every time you enjoy your easy-breathing freedom in Christ and contemplate your fabulous future among the celestials, thank a God-hardened Jew.

“In their offense is salvation to the nations” (Romans 11:11).

It doesn’t get much plainer than that.

OOPSIE-HAZY

Paul is going to spend the next nine verses pulling the rug out from underneath the nation that thinks it knows everything, but in reality knows nothing: Israel. Up until this point, Paul has directed his readers’ attention to nature (that is, instinct) and the conscience. These things

serve together to condemn everyone who either has no access to Scripture, or who has never heard of what God did, through Christ, to love and save the world. These folks try to plead ignorance. They think it's convincing to say, "I never had Scripture!" (It does have a nice ring to it). They gather their hopes around, "I lived in the Outback and never even heard of Jesus Christ!" (I can't blame them for trying that. I would if I were them.) Yet neither of these defendants shall be acquitted, because creation shouts daily and at night of the genius and love of God. Additionally, the conscience is a never-ending hammer, either accusing or defending.

For instance, even the Outback guy marveled at the kangaroo, and the sunset, and the mango. I talked about these mangoes in an earlier chapter. Besides that, the Aborigine's conscience convicted him via invisible, mysterious methods, of how often he failed the Creator of the



mango. Credit this to some hazy yet universal inner knowing. This is my definition of the conscience: "a hazy yet universal inner knowing." This particular Aboriginal was fond of eating more mangoes than he ought. The conscience told the Aboriginal one day not to eat that extra mango. His conscience took the microphone of his brain and said, "I'm drawing the line. This last mango is excessive." The guy ate it anyway. (His lovely fashion model wife, back in the States, has a similar problem with oranges; see illustration.) It did him in, sin-wise. Ten mangoes fit the consciencinal (don't look up this word, I invented it) safety zone, but the eleventh mango crossed its victim over into gluttony. The Aboriginal spit on his conscience and sinned.

Isn't that nice of God to provide a way to be doomed, even if one has never rejected Jesus Christ? It actually is

nice of Him; no one can be rescued from doom who is not first doomed. (Always remember that it was me who told you this.) Temporary doom is essential to an eternal deliverance that will forever feel good. Here, then, is another catch-phrase to describe Romans 1:18-3:3:20—"Essential, temporary doom."

Because God took the Jews aside, befriended them above all other peoples, whispered to them His counsels, and imparted to them His written revelation, the Jews consider themselves in an entirely different category than the rest of humanity. Well, they should. I don't blame them. Who wouldn't strut and wear nicer clothes on the heels of such patronage? The problem is that these divine favors, rather than humbling the Jews, stimulated their inherent human pride, which then grew fangs and claws. There is no more barbaric

enemy than one who exercises his basic human foibles (greed, pride, envy and the like) while imagining God to be his chief defender. As if God would justify (apart from Christ) such sins. "Let's amass power and wealth for God!" What are the Jews thinking? How could God approve of it? Talk about blindness. Such optical disability is not exclusive to Israel. Similar feats of sightlessness waft from Christian television and off the lips of professed Christian politicians.

SOURCE OF HUMILITY

True assessment of divine favor humbles the man or woman who realizes how dim a profile he or she cuts in the glare of divine perfection. When the depth of ineptitude finally hits and all seems lost, *then* God pulls you into His bosom. What a surprise. You thought He was waiting for you to impress Him. Instead, He waited for you to give up that enterprise. What can you do now except weep and babble your gratitude? Among the religious, one rarely detects such desperate thanks. The hallmark of the religious is performance, not praise. Ignore, if you can, the stuff called "praise" in the many hymns containing lyrics such as, "give thanks"

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and “we bow humbly before Thee.” (As soon as a people resort to King James language, something is amiss.) It’s lip service. Why give thanks for something you accomplished with either your free will or your exceptional behavior?

So Paul devotes a considerable portion of *Romans* proving to the Jew that possession of the law, rather than immunizing him from judgment, invites its harshest sentence. It’s worse to sin against light than darkness.

Keep in mind that the judgment and condemnation of this portion of *Romans* does not yet account for Christ. Romans 1:18 through 3:20 presents a Christless conundrum. Apart from the opening strains of this letter, Paul has not once mentioned the Messiah. This is by design.

Christ came to the Jews. When present, He condemned their self-righteousness. The fishermen, tax collectors and prostitutes, took notice. This bunch had nothing to lose. The priesthood was another story. For this tribe, everything was on the line: reputation, money, power, wives. Easier for a camel to beat a cheetah in a footrace than for these poll-watching posers to enter the Millennium.

REPUTATION CONFLAGRATION

I feel so sorry for the people for whom preaching brings reputation, money, power, and the conditional support of a fickle partner whose personality requires popularity and financial clout. The only way a minister of God can garner passing advantage in an upside-down eon, is by falling headlong into the snare of the cross. The snare of the cross (Galatians 5:11) is the cross’ simplicity and studied refusal of human contribution. One needs only to teach salvation as a deal between God and human co-operation, and one is assured of backslaps, handshakes, shapely brunettes, swelling congregations, and dollar bills.

From 2 Timothy 4:3-4--

For the era will be when they will not tolerate sound teaching, but, their hearing being tickled, they will heap up for themselves teachers in accord with their own desires, and, indeed, they will be turning their hearing away from the truth, yet will be turned aside to myths.

Please grasp this snare of the cross thing. The snare of the cross is its completeness. It snares people because it is too done. The cross leaves nothing for human contribution. This upsets the human: *How can it be that I can’t contribute? There must be something about me to distinguish me from the unbelieving, hell-bound rabble. The only thing I*

can think of is performance, ritual, personal sacrifice.

Too bad they never think of God having chosen them.

Honestly, though, who can blame the Jews for thinking this way? (Watch out, I’m about to sympathize with these people.) God introduced Himself to them via ritual, performance, and personal sacrifice. By these means, God purposely tripped His people. They never considered that He personally would have to give them the ability. That’s a bit odd, seeing as God told them through Isaiah, in 26:12 of that prophet’s book, “For, moreover, all our doings You do contrive for us.”

Ultimately, this would include good doings as well as evil ones.

GUINEA PIG NATION

Why did God present Himself this way to the Jews? You aren’t going to like the answer. I don’t like it. When the Jews finally hear the answer, they’ll shake their heads incredulously. (Relief will eventually follow.) Only at the Great White Throne will Israel bow before God’s wisdom. God thus presented Himself to Israel to demonstrate to the rest of humanity the inability of flesh and blood to please Him (Romans 8:7-8). Israel was a guinea pig nation. It sounds harsh and unfair, but that’s how it lays. God considered the lesson of human inability to be so important that He demonstrated it with real people in real places in front of a real universal audience. The real people really had to be convinced that they could please God via laws and self-determination. It behooved God to impress upon them—eventually—the impossibility. In the meantime, it had to look real, feel real, and be real.

It was *so* real.



God will be justified for this. (Get a head start and justify Him now.) Even Israel will one day thank Him for their role in this vital revelation concerning flesh and blood. We benefit from it now. The revelation is not cheap. It cost one nation dearly. Even today, they writhe beneath the deception.

Some in Israel realized the end-game. This required divine revelation. When Jesus arrived to expound upon it, the fishermen got it. The tax-collectors saw the wisdom. The prostitutes received the light, and stopped feeling bad about themselves. The real people beheld the perfection of God and blanched. In Jesus they saw His heart and

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cried. Hope now came from somewhere outside themselves. This was blessed relief. These moral outcasts still performed the necessary ritual, but with softer hearts. Even their dedication smacked of lack—they knew this now. God’s favor humbled them. They beat their breasts, poured oil on His feet, and greeted Him with palm fronds.

For those knowing their need, sin disappears beneath the cross. For the Pharisees, whose mistaken self-appraisal is legendary, sin remains. This statement is relative. Sin is gone in the sight of God, but remains in practical experience for those having no need of Christ complete. Sin must still agitate these people, try them, educate them. Those still striving have yet to reckon themselves to have died with Christ (Romans 6:6). They one day will.

The worst sin, then, is failure to recognize need. If a thousand sins wrack your life, a single dependent glance upon Christ erases them. However, if only one sin besets you—the sin of not needing Him completely—then no other sinlessness matters. The one sin (self-sufficiency) damns you to living misery, in spite of God’s smile.

FREE WILL

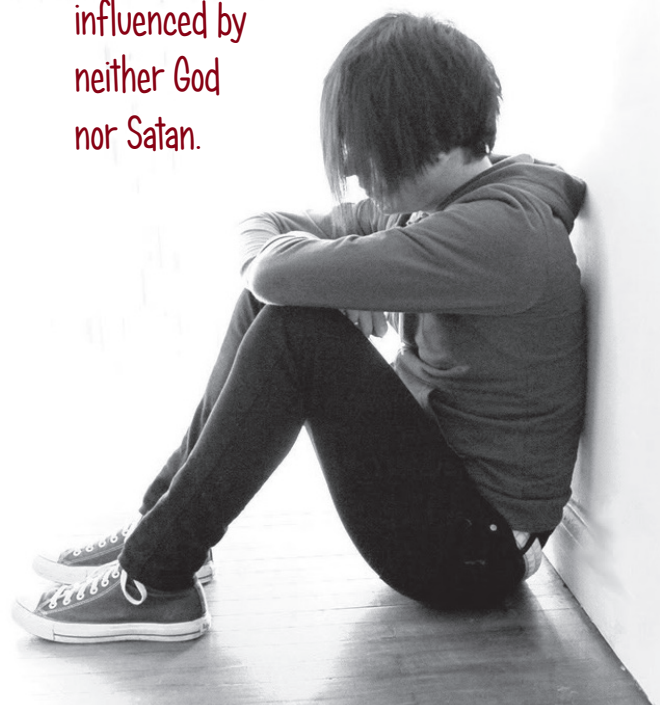
The doctrine of human free will denies one’s need. The doctrine of human free will makes wisdom the only need—the wisdom required to decide correctly concerning the cross. This is the snare of the cross. The snare of the cross, again, is the sufficiency of the cross. Humans want

to add to it. The subtlest of all additions is human free will. Few people consider free will to be the addition that it is. This is the seduction of human free will. After all, Paul says, “Believe” (Acts 16:31). Paul assumes an appreciation of belief as a gift. He says it’s a gift in Romans 12:3 and Philippians 1:29. For most people, these verses may as well be hidden beneath a bushel basket. They never see them. Even seeing the truth of the gift is a gift. If belief truly is a gift, then nothing performance-wise distinguishes the believer from the sinner.

The believer forgets his history of faithlessness. This is chronic. When confronted with the dubious past, he or she dates the change from the day of the “wise decision.” God left him or her alone long enough to choose Christ. He or she managed this feat independent of influence. This is the unstated, too-honest definition of free will: *God leaves you alone*. If He influences you at all, you’re not free. A free will is influenced by neither God nor Satan. Such will must by definition exist in a vacuum of self. Does this sound Scriptural? Where, in Writ, do we find the phrase, “vacuum of self”?

This is the sin of Israel—one of them. Paul writes to

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the Galatians concerning the snare of the cross:

Now I, brethren, if I am still heralding circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? Consequently, the snare of the cross of Christ has been nullified (Galatians 5:11).

Believers *are* categorically different. Entrance into the category, however, is based on God rather than ritual or behavior. This is the whole lesson of Romans, chapter nine. We will be getting to it. Chapter nine heralds the sovereignty of God. God chooses whomever He wants. Period. It's as though He was choosing wearing a blindfold. Nothing is fair about it. Stop looking for fair; you're thinking like a human. Seeing, feeling, or observing forms no part of God's choice. From our standpoint, His choices are inexplicable. So be it—I hope. We humans are so performance oriented, few of us believe Romans chapter nine, in spite of the plain, simple statements there. Few Scriptures speak so frankly, with such shockingly plain words. We are too performance oriented. We are too politically correct than to favor one person or people over others, for no apparent reason other than our own personal wants.

We are favor-redistributionists.

DIVINE NEPOTISM

I compare God's favor of one over another to a boss hiring his son. The son is inept, but here he comes anyway. Pop gives him his own office. Humans rightly rail at that. Humans can't do business this way; leaders promote the meritorious. But last I looked, God is not a human. He promotes based on nothing but agape love, that is, love blind to an object's merit. Does He not love everyone? Of course. Did He not love each and every disciple? Of course. Yet Peter, James and John comprised an exclusive posse. Among even these, John is called, "the disciple of whom Jesus was fond" (John 20:2). Shouldn't we allow the Son of God special friends among the special, based on nothing besides what He wants? I highly recommend it.

John was no better than the rest. Perhaps Andrew worked harder at discipl-ish tasks. It could be that Bartholomew served more superlatively than John. I believe John was the class lay-about, the poet, the dreamer, the guy sitting under the tree. (Consider the task he later assumed at Patmos.) I suspect that there was something screwy about the man. Being a screw-up in this life is of great benefit, but neither is divine choosing *based* on schmuckdom. It is God's right to do with His love what

He will. It is eventually for everyone, though immediately for His darlings.

► "God is the Savior of all humanity, especially of believers" (1 Timothy 4:10).

► "Consequently, then, to whom He will, He is merciful, yet whom He will, He is hardening" (Romans 9:18).

The Jews missed every one of these memos, so Paul pulls the rug out from under them. *Hard.*

GOD FOLLOWS THROUGH

The thing about God, though, is that He will eventually follow through with His stated intentions concerning Israel. He is not so mean to purposely trip a guinea-pig nation, and then permanently discard them. He made His necessary point to the world, and now He's going to scrap the test animal? God is not so arbitrarily cruel. He gave Israel an impossible task, then demanded that they accomplish it. They predictably failed. God is not shocked. Israel is, Christianity is, but God isn't. You may say that God is mean. It would be mean of God to demonstrate human inability using real people, then ditch the real people. He doesn't do that. Instead, He eventually gives the real people supernatural means to fulfill the impossible things that He demanded of them. This is called the New Covenant.

The thousand-year kingdom is time segregated by God to "make it up" to Israel. He will still be "making it up" to them on the New Earth, where they will reign as kings. They'll be glad for their strange history. Only the contrast of fleshly confidence against divine ability brings a person—or a nation—to the pinnacle of reliance. In the meantime, we beneficiaries of Israel's disobedience frolic in heaven, partaking of exponentially greater glories than even those of Israel during Eon 5. They won't be jealous. They will salute us. We will be happy for them, and they for us. God will be seen for what He always has been: a complete freaking genius. Everyone's cup will overflow, even God's.

HYPOCRISY ON STERIODS

"Besides, you have confidence in yourself to be a guide of the blind, a light to those in darkness, a discipliner of the imprudent, a teacher of minors, having the form of knowledge and the truth in the law. You, then, who are teaching another, you are not teaching yourself!" (Romans 2:19-21).

We talked about hypocrisy in an earlier edition. Does not every one of these terms apply as much to Christians as to Jews? 1) self-confidence, 2) a guide, 3) a light, 4) a discipliner, 5) a teacher, 6) a form of knowledge and truth. Christians boast of these qualities and impose them upon others, while simultaneously failing them all. Like the Jews, they will be the last to be apprised of their own hypocrisy.

The next statement is almost funny, except it isn't: "You, then, who are teaching another, you are not teaching yourself!" In a comedy club, this line would get big laughs. People would spill their drinks. In this context, however, we just want to cry. How can a people become so disassociated from their own need? How can they be so deceived? Why can't they see their own failings when objective observers spot it a mile away?

Credit the blindness to God. When God blinds, it sticks until He unsticks it. He blinds people like nobody's business.



Some may say, "But Martin. You are a teacher also. You are a guide, and a light, and even a discipliner. Aren't you, then, a hypocrite, too?"

No, I am not. For one thing, I'm never above being taught or disciplined myself. I am perfectly capable of imprudence. I don't know how many times I have said on my daily Internet show, "I am teaching myself right along with you." I'm in the same boat as my readers and listeners. I am habitually rehearsing my failures, quirks and foibles, both in print and in voice media. Above all, the truth I hold is not mere form. It is the real deal. It is His wisdom and knowledge, not mine. God has possessed me of His light and love. I know the source of this, and it's not me.

Feel free to take the truths above as your own. You are not crazy. Neither are you like everyone else. You are special, not because you are special, but because God chose you especially. The truth you grasp is real. If it was mere form, you would be rich and popular. As Paul says, "If I am still heralding circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?" Anyone heralding circumcision—that is, any work of the flesh—will impress and command popular culture. Paul suffered persecution, not because he was still heralding a salvation-contributory work of flesh, but because he had abandoned all such work, and all such boasting. Persecution followed, and always will.

Take away works—then duck.

Self-righteousness is the ultimate blinder. It will take away your sight, even as you curse others for not seeing. You yourself believe institutionally-packaged lies, at the same time eschewing falsehoods from lofty podiums. It is the most stunning phenomenon known. It is the "American Idol" phenomenon, described last week—you just can't see how bad you are. The cause of such embarrassing ignorance is simply this: self righteousness. It is a false estimation of one's own ability, based on stupidity. In the singing department, it mildly amuses us. In the department of spirituality, we stare appalled into its eyes.

Speaking of the Jews again, Paul writes in Romans 10:2—

For I am testifying to them that they have a zeal of God, but not in accord with recognition. For they, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, were not subjected to the righteousness of God.

Nothing blinds one faster to the righteousness of God than a preoccupation with one's own behavior.

For some people, it's a full-time job. —MZ