



Sunday, February 16, 2014 Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

ROMANS

Part 16

Chapter 3:1-4



Romans 3:1-4

What, then, is the prerogative of the Jew, or what the benefit of circumcision? Much in every manner. For first, indeed, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. For what if some disbelieve? Will not their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God? May it not be coming to that!

Paul has just spent twelve verses hammering God's chosen people—the Jews—for being less godly than the men and women of the nations who had never heard of Abraham, Isaac or

Jacob. Just when the reader starts feeling anti-Semitic winds blowing in his or her heart, Paul re-enters to defend the same people he just practically decimated. The same man who has kicked them to the ground is now rushing over with a first aid kit and a keg of brandy. This signals the beginning of chapter 3.

On the heels of the brutal criticism of 2:17-29, a reader's first question might be, "What, then, is the prerogative of the Jew, or what the benefit of Circumcision?" In other words, "Since these people are so bad, what's the use of being one?" To hear some contemporary scholars answer this question, the answer is, "There is no use."

As we've discussed many times, there is a popular teaching circulating called "Preterism," stating that God is finished with His literal people (they're just too stubborn), and members of the body of Christ (those of non-Israelite descent) supplant Israel to become "spiritual Israel." If this teaching was true and God was finished with His literal people, the answer to Paul's question ("What good is it to be a Jew?") would indeed be, "Nothing." That Paul's answer is, "Much in every manner," disproves all assertions that God is finished with His literal people.

SAY IT AIN'T SO

The temporary problem with Israel isn't with the nation as a whole, but with the faithless majority. God does not discard the whole apple harvest because of a few rotten specimens. The opposite is true. The few good apples (the "remnant" of Romans chapter eleven such as Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David and the like), are God's faithful pledge that the rest of the harvest will come in (Romans 11:1-27). It will be the result of a miracle, but they will come in.

Paul's commendation of Israel is that she was entrusted with the oracles of God, that is, the Scriptures.

It's a big deal. No other nation got the Writings. How important are these? Without them, we would know nothing specific about God. We would have no evidence that Jesus Christ even lived. Many refuse to believe this. They marginalize the Word of God, and then tell me, "I

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have other ways to learn from Jesus." I say, "Learn from Who?" and they say, "From Jesus." I say, "From *Who*?" This goes on several more times before they get my point that without the famous penmen Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they'd be as ignorant as

fish about the Jesus they embrace at the expense of Scripture. They'd be ignorant of every major spiritual tenet that they take for granted, including the one about God so loving the world that He sent His only begotten Son to save it from sin and death.

Many believe they are too spiritual for the Scriptures. They like to "flow in the spirit" and receive revelations in the form of dreams, shadows on their wall, or impressions received in the shower. God does not dictate His counsels this way. Yes, there is the "still small voice" within helping us to walk worthily of our calling, but that is not a literal voice that is whispered in the manner of the voice in *Field of Dreams*. This happens only in Bible movies. (And in *Field of Dreams*.) There is no Scriptural indication that God talks in library tones. Our Lord, in order to reach the masses while on earth, projected His voice with the volume of a 300-pound Italian tenor. Paul had no trouble hearing Him on the road to Damascus; His glory knocked Him to the ground. So did His voice, I'm guessing. There is no record of Paul asking Him to repeat Himself.

The still small voice is the conscience. It doesn't speak. Rather, it inaudibly nudges. One simply gets im-

pressions such as, "I probably shouldn't kill this person," or, "Maybe I should hold off on that last pancake."

PROPHET SCHMOPHET

Because Scripture is complete, there are no prophets today. Prophets were necessary in the days when God's Word was still under construction. God doesn't have arms or hands; He therefore can't hold pens. Thus, He hired ghost writers. Back in the day, He talked directly to people who could hold pens, and did. These people wrote the Scriptures. They were the spokespeople of God, and today we refer to these men as prophets or seers. God still uses spokespeople, but now they take their marching orders from the Word (the Word that the former prophets and seers put to paper), and not from their dreams, apparitions or audible voices.

People who hear audible voices—when no one is around—ought never to trust them. The voices are either demonic or the result of a mental condition.

To be entrusted with Scripture is a big deal. We must hold the Jews in esteem for preserving the sacred Writings—never mind that they don't believe them. Few people value Scripture, even now. Even some so-called believers downplay its importance. It's too "old fashioned" to refer to a text. If one needs to don reading glasses, well, that's just carnal. It's "too intellectual." To be intellectual (according to popular thought) is to cease being spiritual. As if spirit and intellect fatally collide. Yet I read in Romans 12:2 that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, not the removal of them.

There was a day when the Scriptures were one's lifeline to God. We are still in that day. We are even *more* in that day. The Scriptures are not only our lifeline to God, but our rescue from the unwitting deceptions of charlatans and false prophets (sorry for the redundancy), packaging their feelings, instincts and dreams into the seductively packaged statement, "thus saith the Lord."

DOES GOD TRUST HUMANS?

Paul uses the phrase, "entrusted with," as in, "they were entrusted with the oracles of God." God is said here to have trusted human beings with a critically vital role. This is a relative statement. God can't and doesn't trust anyone. He doesn't count on people. He knows what people are, and what they do. Thus, He doesn't throw His papers in the air and summon His secretary when the creatures of His hand fail Him.

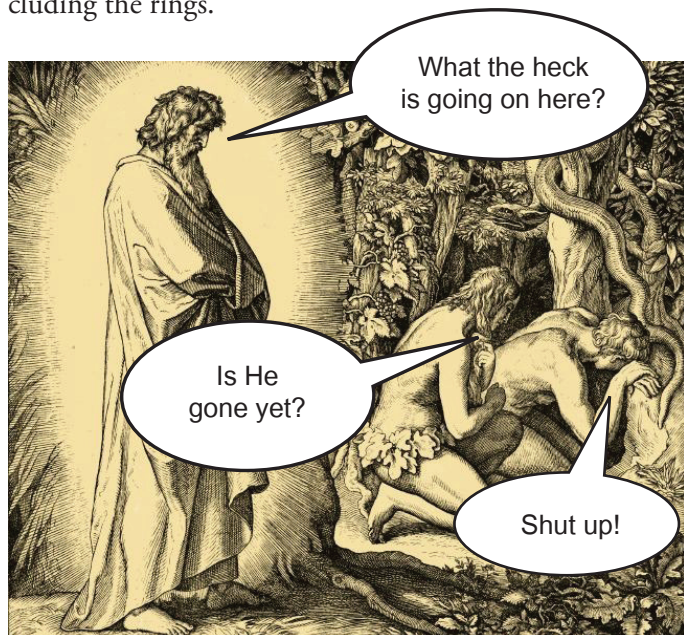


When He prophesies that something will happen, He doesn't light up cigarettes and drum His fingers nervously on the dining room table, hoping for fulfillment. Human beings enact His pre-determined plan. Everything God does on Earth's grand stage demonstrates human inability and His ultimate power and wisdom. This production is staged against the backdrop of that human inability. Absolutely speaking, Israel was meant to make hash of its duty to protect the Word. They were meant to be the disobeyers of the very law God called them to safeguard. This allows Paul's following statement to make more sense:

“For what if some disbelieve? Will not their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God?”

PARADISE TEMPORARILY LOST

The Christian answer to this question is, “Yes, of course.” (Paul's answer is, “May it not be coming to that!—Romans 3:4; who do you want to believe: the Christian religion or the Apostle Paul?) Christianity places human will on par with God's. It's worse than this, because it makes the human will stronger than God's. How? It can thwart His plans. Isn't this what they say happened in the Garden of Eden? God envisioned an earthly Utopia apart from blood, tears, and daytime television. Out comes Satan, the slippery, uncontrollable snake with a free will the size of Saturn, including the rings. God could have stopped Satan (they say), but chose not to. He knew the catastrophic result (they say), but why interrupt Satan's little fling? God couldn't interrupt Satan if He tried (they say) because—remember?—Satan has a free will the size of Saturn, including the rings.



Satan deceives the woman, who deceives the man, who hides from God, Who says, “What the heck happened here?” (*They say.*) Is He taken by surprise? (*They say He is.*) No. The Edenic “fall” occurred on schedule. Sin is a prerequisite for a display of grace. Without “as in Adam all are dying” (1 Corinthians 15:22), there is no “thus also in Christ, shall all be vivified” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

God questions the human (“Adam, where are you?”) so that the human can confront himself.

Human unbelief does not nullify the faithfulness of God. We must discard, then, every major Christian tenet, for every major Christian tenet relies upon the faulty premise that the disbelief of humanity can and does derail what God wants to happen.

According to Christian teaching, Israel's failure nullifies the faithfulness of God. He promised to bring them into a thousand-year kingdom, but now God must substitute non-Israelites for real ones (“Preterism”), then pretend that He's somehow still been faithful to His literal promises made to His literal people. According to Christian teaching, every single unbeliever nullifies the faithfulness of God. God promises to be the Savior of all humanity (1 Timothy 4:10), but billions of humans undermine that promise because they refuse to accept Him. God sends these unbelievers to hell while saving a few hundred measly thousand, insisting that He can still refer to Himself, in the wake of such a disaster, as “the Savior of all humanity.”

It's a sham. It's a crock. If we are to believe standard Christian teaching, it would be a sham and a crock. Or a crock and a sham. It would be a shrock. A cram.

It is neither. God promises, then performs. He takes His time. Human unbelief, rather than frustrating and ultimately derailing Him, plays into His hands. Human unbelief provides Him the necessary contrast for the eventual faith of all. In God's drama, death becomes life; poor becomes rich; stupid becomes brilliant; unbelievers become believers—all in due time.

After years, decades, and millennia of stoking human failure, God suddenly and miraculously enables these same creatures to ace the exam. He fulfills all of His promises and blesses every human; these are simultaneous events. Everyone will be happy.

Well? What else would you expect? He's the happy God (1 Timothy 1:11). —MZ