



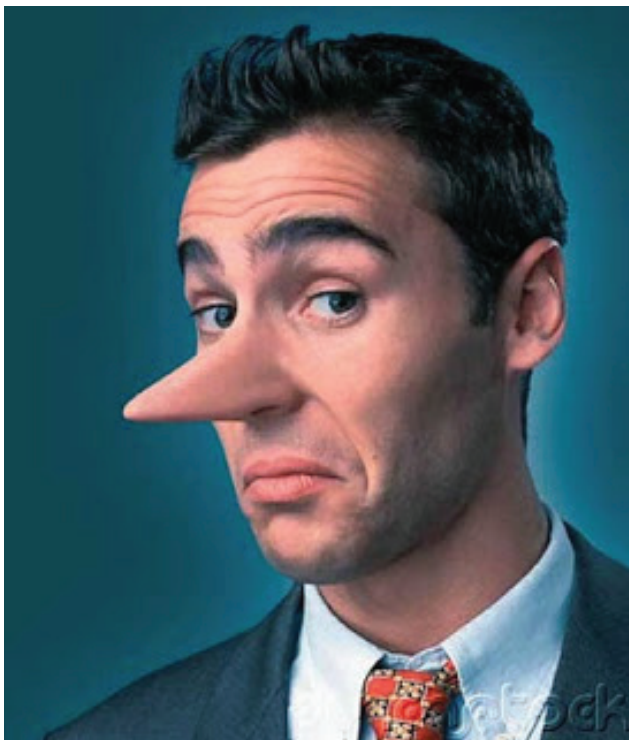
Sunday, March 2, 2014

Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

ROMANS

Part 18

Chapter 3:4-8



Romans 3:4-8 (again)

For what if some disbelieve? Will not their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God? May it not be coming to that! Now let God be true, yet every man a liar, even as it is written: “That so Thou shouldst be justified in Thy sayings, and shalt be conquering when Thou art being judged.” Now if our injustice is commending God’s righteousness, what shall we declare? Not that God Who is bringing on indig-

nation is unjust! (As a man am I saying it.) May it not be coming to that! Else how shall God be judging the world? Yet if the truth of God superabounds in my lie, for His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner, and why not say, according as we are calumniated and according as some are averring that we are saying, that “We should be doing evil that good may be coming”? — whose judgment is fair.

Why would God lock up all together in sin and stubbornness? The simple answer is so that He can have mercy on the same all (Romans 11:32). God cannot be merciful to those who—by themselves—deserve nothing but good. They *must* be locked up in stubbornness first. But isn’t it unjust of God to do this? Paul says it’s not. Paul is under the personal conviction that God has the right to do whatever He wants. Even if every human was to lie about God incessantly or convict Him of wrongdoing, God still incessantly does right things. He has not made a mistake yet. God will be found right and everyone else wrong. It’s not a numbers game, it’s a God verses humans game.

Paul refuses to wave off the questions, however. These are normal questions of inquisitive people. God does not operate as humans operate. The concept of God’s sovereignty, for instance, befuddles most people: how can God be doing everything, but we do things, too? In addition, the truth of the contrast principle (we can’t know good apart from evil) is so simple that overly clever people trip over it. Intellectuals stumble over what the contrast principle truly is: the answer to all evil. Many of these questions continue to be mysteries to most, though the answers are plainly stated in Romans and other of Paul’s letters.

If too many questions are banging around in his readers’ brains, Paul can’t inspire the utter silence he

requires when he finally announces the stupendous truth of 3:21. He needs to pacify the questioning heart so that the revelation of 3:21 hits a soothed rather than a soured inquisitor. Rather than seeing Romans 3:3-8 as a digression, then, consider it a necessary defense of God's methods.

Paul is aware of the charges against God. No doubt he has entertained some of them himself. God looks to be crazy. He is not. There is method to His madness. We may not grasp all His methods, but we don't have to. Just knowing He *has* methods comforts us. Paul unfurls for us in the book of Romans what, at first blush, seems to be a madcap, arbitrary plan. Is this really the best way to save humanity from sin? A man dying on a cross? The Son of *God* dying on a cross? Then to have everyone reject Him, including the nation He chose to be His special acceptors? Paul dreads his readers thinking that God is either unjust or unfair for concocting such a scheme (see how we think? see the derogatory terms we apply to Him, such as "concocting"?)—a scheme of no apparent reason or rhyme. There is much rhyme, however, and reason galore; Paul takes care to settle our hearts.

1) What, then is the prerogative of the Jew? (3:1)

Paul himself answers this question: "Much in every manner." Even though God temporarily sets them aside, He is not finished with Israel.

2) What if some Jews disbelieve? (3:3)

Paul doesn't like that most of his countrymen disbelieve; it's the greatest sadness of his life. Paul cares more about God's reputation than he does about his own personal feelings (I recommend this disposition, if you can manage it), so he asks the following question:

3) Will not their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God? (3:3)

Paul does not answer this with a simple "no." The very thought that God's intentions could be derailed by pea-brains makes Paul want to throw dust in the air and stomp his feet. His answer is an emphatic, "May it not be coming to that!"

4) If our injustice is commending God's righteousness, shall we declare that God Who is bringing on indignation is unjust? (3:5)

Here we enter into new territory. We can grasp the concept of God using human beings to do good things such as herald the Word, give to the poor, encourage one another, or frost cakes on New York subway trains. I saw this latter thing on YouTube just this morning. A woman brought a giant cake on the subway and frosted

it in front of curious onlookers. Then she cut it up and passed pieces around to people who don't ordinarily even look at one another. Everyone gobbled it up.

These are matters of just human behavior and they commend God's righteousness. In other words, when we see people doing things like this (nice things, frosted things), it makes God seem righteous. We point to such things and say, "God is a good God. He is happy. If God was here, He would probably frost cakes on New York City subway trains." Such behavior reflects well upon the Deity and sits well



with us, because it is positive and agrees with our spiritual digestive system. But what about human *in*-justice? It's a lot harder to look at that and declare God to be just (Paul insists that, no matter what you are looking at, God is always just). Mean people make us wonder why God made mean people in the first place. Many of them vex us.

If God uses human beings to enact His ultimate intentions, and if this human activity includes sinful things such as the decisions of the Jews and Romans to crucify Jesus Christ, then we have a harder time not shaking our fist into heaven and cursing His name.

Let's talk about the worst case scenario. The injustice of the Jews commends God's righteousness. He hardens nearly the entire people (Romans 11:8), not only to teach them a lesson (they cannot please God by works of flesh), but to make way for non-Israelites (you and me) to be saved and become members of the body of Christ. Paul describes it well in Romans 1:11, "In their offense is salvation to the nations." It was righteous of God to do this—not just the effect, but the cause. The evil acts of Israel matted and framed what God would do with us. Since what God does with us is righteousness, and because it comes on the heels of

Israel disobedience, the Israel disobedience therefore commends the righteousness of God; it leads to it.

You have to follow the dominos backward. If the last domino is great, but the first domino seems horrible, then the first domino is not horrible at all because without it the last domino cannot fall. Every domino in the series is necessary. If it's a Rube Goldberg invention we're analogizing, you must wait to see the purpose of the strange machine, the outcome of the seemingly unnecessary fuss and clatter. If a light is engaged, or a piece of bread is toasted at the end, then the mousetrap springing and the golf ball falling on the teeter-totter—all parts of the process—are justified.

“COMMEND”

“Commend” means “To present, mention, or praise as worthy of confidence notice, kindness, etc.” In our minds it is difficult for evil things to commend God, especially when applied to something so repulsive as the crucifixion of the naked Christ. God made sure His Son got crushed and then crucified. The bad people disrobed Him and gambled for his clothes. This necessary humiliation of Christ required that God harden the hearts of the Romans and the Jews. No people—neither Romans nor Jews—could accomplished such atrocities on their own. God accomplished this task through them. It commended His righteousness only because of the last domino, which has yet to drop (God “all in all”—1 Corinthians 15:28). I am tempted to say God went overboard with many of the humiliations and pains of Christ, but that's just the thing: He didn't. There was not one ounce more evil than what was required. It takes vast amounts of faith to say this, and I have been blessed with vast amounts of the stuff. It doesn't mean I don't gripe. The circumstances of life sometimes fog my vision.



All right, I hate it. The crucifixion of Christ dripped with breakfast-hurling evil. How odd, though, to say that the crucifixion of Christ commends God's righteousness. Insert the definition of “commends” to make it odder still: “That God inspired humans to nail His Son to a Roman stake of execution makes us point to God and praise Him and His righteousness as worthy of our confidence.”

If you had been standing at the foot of the cross, your confidence would have been shaken, if not beaten. Let's get contemporary now. If some present trial compromises your confidence in the kindness of God, see it as part of His righteousness. This trial has to happen. It *has* to. It is hard sometimes to praise Him as worthy when He comes across as an unscrupulous teenager spraying evil from a can. If God was a human being, He would be judged insane and either sent to a mental institution or executed.

If you can't be this honest, then I will do it for you. (This may be a sidetrack, but then it might not be.) Honesty is your best friend. Honesty will grease the skids of revelation, because God gives copiously to people who drop pretensions and get real with Him. If you can be as honest with God as Job was, you are on the fast track to learning divine secrets. The blessings come much quicker after you've scraped all the skin from your bones with a piece of broken pottery, looked up to heaven, and cursed the day you were born.

“Honesty will grease the skids of revelation, because God gives copiously to people who drop pretensions.”

I highly recommend this course. You might as well do it, because if you can't tell your Father what is happening to you, who can you tell? You are a piece of broken pottery, so you may as well scrape yourself with one of the shards and ignore all the Christian recommendations to “don't worry, be happy.” Do this, and God will bless you so fast that your socks will shoot from your feet and strike the opposing wall. In other words, God will show you the flip side of your suffering. It may take a while. You have to be patient. If you never prayed before, start now. Pray selfishly, at first. If you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of others. (“Put your own oxygen mask on before assisting others,” is what the flight attendants say. Such advice seems selfish, but it's not.)



Pray for patience. Then pray for faith. It is hard to say which you should pray for first. I say pray for faith first, because you will need the patience to wait for the faith. Rest assured that God is on it. He is preparing a vat of faith for you. He is mixing it with the right ingredients of joy and suffering. Give Him time. It's not that He can't do it fast, it's just that He is one of the slowest Beings in the universe (this is the Martin Zender perspective.) You can't begrudge Him His timetable, because they whole shebang has been decided beforehand. Don't think things aren't moving. According to God, He's flying along. According to His perspective, He's in the fast lane. Nothing you say or do or pray will speed it up a nanosecond. You don't have to pray out loud, but God does like to hear it.

You can be with God in His beautiful laboratory when you cry into His lap and dare Him to answer you. I am all for kicking up a storm. Just look Him in the eye when you do it. If you're ashamed of yourself, it won't work. You have to want truth badly enough. Few people can do this. Few have the childlike talent. Religion prevents them from doing it. Religion tells you to put on a happy face and "buck up." This is terrible advice. In the depth of suffering, I don't know how to do

that. "Smile!" Okay, I will. Eventually. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe after the crucifixion. Maybe after I've run out of pottery shards, I will smile. Maybe at the snatching away I will break into a ridiculous grin and finally say "lol." (Until then, I will never say such a thing.)

Above and beyond salvation, God will give you what you give Him. His blessing is in proportion to how hard you scrape your skin and bleed while looking Him in the eye.

LEAVE THE GOD PROM

Be real, is all I ask of you. Stop pretending. This will eliminate pretensions. Who are you trying to fool? God? *Are you really trying to fool God?* Don't you realize God already knows everything? If He already knows everything, why are you attempting to hide from Him? Are you really trying to straighten your wrinkles and polish your shoes before going to the prom with Him? Are you really trying to force a smile at Him that you are in no way feeling? Don't you think He can see the underlying bone structure? I would like to show you a video capture of Jesus Christ's face at the Garden of Gethsemane. I would like to show you a video capture of Jesus Christ's face on the cross. I would like to show you a video capture of Job's

face when his wife tells him to curse God and die (Job did not “lol”), or when his friends tell him he is a sinner as he scrapes new pieces of flesh with his pottery shard—I will show you that video capture. I’ll show you Mary’s face when Lazarus dies.

For many people, real emotions are awkward. Honesty is to be regretted. This explains nervous laughter. To laugh after honest statements is to negate one’s contribu-



tion as unworthy, stupid, defiled. “I didn’t really mean to be honest. See? Ha, ha ha, this isn’t really me.” But it is them. They are uncomfortable with who they are. It explains the phenomenon of “lol.” Some pop culturist can’t

profess absolute or awkward truth without it. *I cried when my cat died today, lol.* Why is everyone laughing out loud at everything? *You look beautiful today, lol.* In other words, *It is awkward for me to praise you, so please ignore that I had to say it.* Am I really missing so many opportunities to laugh out loud? Maybe I’m missing something. I’m a funny guy, but not that many things are funny.

PRAY FOR MORE FAITH

If you pray for anything, pray for more faith. Faith is the only thing able to get you through your own crucifixion, lol. Even your injustices are commending God’s righteousness. This means that God is doing right things with your sin, lol.

Doing right things with sin is the whole truth of justification. I’ll be talking more about this in Romans chapters three and four. Justification contains a root word: “Just.” It means “right.” I like that word, “right.” I do. It means that, even when I am sinning, I’m right in God’s sight. I am right when I’m sinning, and when I’m not. If I am not sinning I may be proud of it, so I lose either way. Justification covers all of my bases. Our injustice is what the angels point at to tell neutral onlookers that God is kind and trustworthy and worthy of being liked, lavished with gifts, and loved. It takes spiritual insight to see that. (It does help when we see that particular Human Being—

Jesus Christ—glorified and poised to reap a universe forever delivered from sin and death.)

No human ever thought to crucify a human being to accomplish the ultimate eternal good for every living creature, and neither has any human being ever thought to point to human injustice in order to commend God. It works, though. It works for the angels. Human injustice commends God’s grace. You know what I say, or maybe you don’t. I like to say that my place in the body of Christ is to give others the opportunity to exercise grace.

VERY LONG POSTSCRIPT, POSSIBLY UNNECESSARY

It is hard to imagine how low we are. It is potentially embarrassing until you see our outcome. We are ants with faith. Only an ant with faith can look up at the stars and feel any degree of confidence. Only a disciple with faith (John) can look up at the cross and feel confident. Yet he did not feel confident, no, not even John. Not even Jesus’ mother was confident of anything that day. Do you think these two people believed in the resurrection? They didn’t. To them, the death of Jesus Christ was the end of the road. None of His prophecies of resurrection hit them literally. The crucifixion, to them, on that day, did not commend God’s righteousness. Three days later, it was a different story. Thank God they only had to wait three days. Lucky for them.

We may be three days from the snatching away (the transforming of our bodies of humiliation into bodies resembling His body of glory), but my teaching is that we are five minutes away.

Does this mean God lets people off the hook who do bad things that commend His righteousness? The way Paul puts it is, “If our injustice is commending God’s righteousness, shall we declare that God Who is bringing on indignation is unjust?” (3:5) Paul’s answer is, “As a man am I saying it. May it not be coming to that! Else how shall God be judging the world?”

Paul was not in the habit of questioning God. He didn’t like to do it. He has been trained that, no matter how crazy things look, or how unlikely they seem able to ultimately bless the creature and every inhabitant of

“Our injustice is what the angels point at to tell neutral onlookers that God is kind.”

“You seem to be several degrees smarter than me and have a better view of the universe.”

old-creation man. A new-creation man has given up on all the old opinions and worries. An old-creation man reasons with God and says, “If I were You, I wouldn’t do it that way.” A new-creation man says, “In my flesh dwells no good thing, and I don’t know anything as I ought, really, so do Your thing, God, since You seem to be several degrees smarter than me and have a better view of the universe.”

INDIGNATION CONFLAGRATION

Remember that God is not indignant with us. We are golden because we have been chosen as members of the body of Christ and do not come into judgment. The world has not been so chosen. God’s indignation is still coming upon them, but this has nothing to do with eternal torment. The day of indignation that will visit this earth will wake up the world. That’s its purpose. It has a purpose. It isn’t the end, but rather a means to the end. We’ve already been awakened, but it was done elegantly. God nudged our shoulders and sprinkled a little cold water into our eyes with a gentle flick of His fingers. For those whom He purposed as vessels of dishonor, it will take supernatural locusts and hailstones the size of washing machines. Remember: this is for the ultimate good of the people. God disciplines those whom He loves.

So, yes, He still brings indignation on those whose very wicked deeds ultimately commend His righteousness. Otherwise, He can’t judge the world.

The only way you’ll lose the trail here is if you imagine His indignation to be unproductive or unloving. You must see that He disciplines those whom He loves. It is for their ultimate good. He has to judge vessels of dishonor, for their own good. He still needs them as vessels of dishonor, so He makes them that way. Paul says that He “carries them with much patience” (Romans 9:22). He carries them—that is, works hard to sustain them in

the universe, God still knows what He’s doing. This is why he says, “As a man am I saying it.” He is speaking as the person he used to be. He’s still a man, but now he’s a “new creation” man. Here, however, he is speaking as the

their stubbornness—but then still judges them. Stop reasoning about this and simply accept it. Stop saying that, if you were God, you would do it differently. Of course you would. You would give us all lollipops for breakfast. I would lean toward pancakes with real maple syrup. Either way, you would screw up everyone’s insulin levels.

MY PLATFORM FROM HELL

I would have accomplished the “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28) without death, don’t you know. Oh yes. I would have run for the God-office on the platform that I could bring about the “all in all” apart from embalmers and black cars with drapes in the windows. I would have spared John and Mrs. Jesus the death of the Son, that’s for



sure. Because of this (don’t you know), I would flop. My universe would be a big vacuous yawn. There would be no contrast. Everything would be boring, flat, dull. All clothing would be gray with not a single accent color. Everyone would be taking naps all day, and getting fat. Jesus would work at a Lowe’s, selling hardware. Satan would be the governor of Wisconsin, and everyone would respect him. I would run on the platform of Pharaoh letting the Israelites go. My Israelites would not even be in Egypt. They would be playing hopscotch in Saudi Arabia with the descendants of Esau. It never even would have gotten that far, because Adam never would have sinned. He would have lived forever while riding on the backs of llamas and lions, never appreciating God. How is that for a plan?

I would have won in a stupid, ignorant landslide of sheer wasted love. —MZ

**THANK YOU FOR LOVE AND
SUPPORT. EVERY WORD FROM
YOU IS APPRECIATED.**