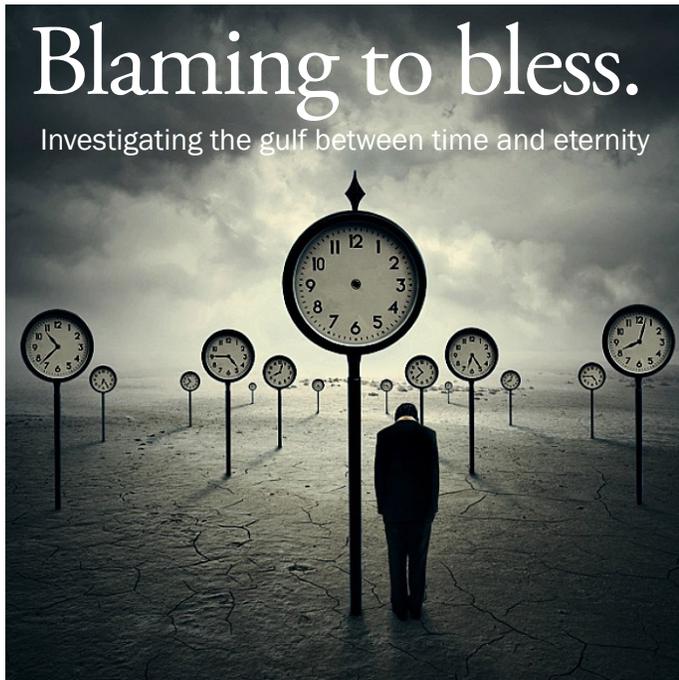


ROMANS Part 87

Chapter 9:19



19 You will be protesting to me, then, “Why, then, is He still blaming? for who has withstood His intention?”

BLAMING

This famous protest comes on the heels of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart and then blaming Pharaoh for having a hardened heart. As I’ve said, it’s the only way God can do business. He lives apart from time, but then decides to *create* time so that He can then create beings within the time who are dependent on time and who must learn stuff during the time’s passage. Because God never stops being God but *also* because He

has created this time thing, He has a “problem.” How does He keep being a timeless, no-beginning, no-end God but at the same “time” join time? I don’t think it’s that complicated for Him. He simply stoops to it. Whenever we “see” him or hear from Him, therefore, He is stooping—much as very tall people must stoop when coming through short doorways. God stoops to join His own creation with all of its time zones, alarm clocks and miseries.

This stooping is always a figure of speech because God is not really this limited. I have told you this many times but it bears repeating because of this blaming issue. How can God hold people accountable for things that He makes them do? This apparent contradiction of a timeless God performing in time is a figure of speech known as *Condescension*. “Condescension” is a fancy word for stooping. During these times when we “see” or hear from God, God oftentimes acts as though He is just as maddened and puzzled by this time-world as we are. He does this out of empathy, to help us through our lives. He holds our hands, you might say. To do this, He must obviously (at least I thought it was obvious) step down—way, way down—from His personal realm of timelessness and talk to us like the calendar-obsessed ants that we are. After all, He is the One Who made us this way. He owes it to us, I think. He would not leave us here stranded in time, unaided by His timeless wisdom.

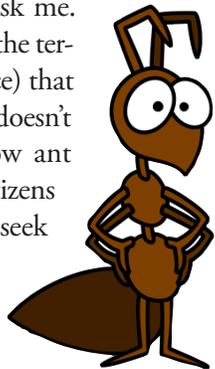
My favorite analogy for this condescension—for those who have never heard it—is human adults “talking” to infants. We goo-goo and gurgle at the infants, not because we’re actually this stupid but because we want to relate to beings who can only goo-goo and gurgle. Thus, we lower ourselves. No one assumes that we who make such noises at these creatures known as babies talk this way at the office, or at home with our partners, or at P.F. Chang’s when ordering our Thai beef and noodle salads. Not even Christians think this. But then, when it comes to God, Christians and other short-sighted people lose



the analogy of adults and babies, along with their minds. It never occurs to the Christians that the gulf between God and humans must be infinitely greater than that between human adults and human babies.

Thus hamstrung, these types of people 1) read passages of Scripture showing God “goo-gooing,” 2) take a snapshot of the limited passage, 3) put the caption “God” underneath the snapshot, and then 4) define God by the figure of speech (Condescension) that was going on in the verse they photographed. Because of this series of unfortunate events, these narrow-frame camera people conclude that God is, in His essence, a gurgling goof just like us, figuring things out as He wanders haphazardly along the highways and byways of His own creation, regretting this, feeling sorry for that, becoming almost uncontrollably incensed at this other thing, and generally losing His mind right along with us. He is full of terrible frustrations and personality quirks, this so-called Deity.

Let’s watch these poor figure-of-speech deniers photograph a famous portion of Scripture where God stoops down to the anthill to commiserate with ants by asking one of the ants a ridiculous, ant-like question. My favorite example of this is the question God posed in the Garden of Eden to the ant named Adam when he said, “Adam, where are you?” *Snapshot! This is the quintessential God!* say the figure-of-speech deniers. It is? Then we’re all in really big trouble, if you ask me. From this terrible mistake comes the terrible teaching (what a coincidence) that the Creator of heaven and earth doesn’t know everything. He is a fellow ant right along with all the other citizens of the anthill. He plays hide ‘n seek with this particular ant named Adam—and the ant named Adam is winning. God can’t find him. The ant god counts



to ten, says “Ready or not, here I come!” and then spends the rest of the day looking for the rogue ant.

Must I tell you how wrong it is to *define* something—anything—by a figure of speech? By this, we would conclude that Jesus Christ is a sheep door. He Himself said, “I am the sheep door” (John 10:7). Shouldn’t Jesus know what He is? Let’s take Him at His word, then. Let’s put him on a hinge and swing Him. *Oh no, let’s not.* It’s a metaphor. The metaphor is a well-known figure of speech. Unfortunately, Condescension is not so well known. Ignorance of it leads to the utmost doctrinal stupidities, including “Open Theism,” which insists that God Himself does not know the future. The basis of this stupidity? Defining God by figures of speech. For truly, it is just as stupid to define God by the figure of speech known as Condescension as it is to define Jesus Christ by the figure of speech known as Metaphor.

Thus, it is easy for God to blame people whom He hardens. Both the blaming and the hardening are temporary, time-based actions occurring only on anthills that lead, in the end, to eternal bliss for creatures who will one day no longer be ants.

THE BENEFITS OF BLAMING

God wrote a Script beforehand and then created everything and everyone that would ever play a role in the staging of this Script, which is everything and everyone. The secret to peace in this life is a correct assessment of God’s ways, His means, and His character. The secret to an accurate assessment of God’s ways, means and character is to understand that God’s style of blaming leads blamees along a path of self-discovery unavailable by any other avenue, eventually benefitting the blamee. The shock of

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self-discovery in the heat of divine arraignment shocks in the short run but blesses in the end.

If God didn’t blame creatures for bad behavior, they would never confront their bad behavior, learn from it, and then move past it into deliverance. It is true that God inspires the bad behavior in the first place by making people sinners, but without sin, there is no salvation. Where is deliverance without a backdrop of



fruitlessness and frustration? Romans 11:32 describes this nicely in the following nutshell: “For God locks up all together in stubbornness that He should have mercy upon all.”

Notice that God does both ends of the thing: the stubbornness and the mercy; the creature is not responsible for any of it. Note, too, the active verbs: “locks” and “have mercy.” This is God’s work from start to finish, from stubbornness to mercy.

TO BLAME OR NOT TO BLAME

As for us, we aren’t blamed for anything because God has given us a rare belief in His simple pronouncements. God just says stuff and we say, “Okay.” This is one of the great perks of being a believer. We stare at God’s PowerPoint presentation (the Scriptures) and say, “Got it.” In other words, we’re not stubborn. Well, we *were* stubborn (see Romans 11:32), but God unlocked us before everyone else. Does this mean that we get robbed of the eventual good that comes from being blamed? No. We do get the eventual good (a realization of God and the ensuing peace), but by another route. For us, the blaming route is closed. We are able to read passages of Scripture such as Romans 11:36—“For out of Him, and through Him, and for Him is all,” and simply believe it. This brings us a realization of the greatness of God and of our own creaturehood in about three seconds, without blaming. I recommend this way. It’s much easier learning humility this way than, say, in the manner of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Here was a man whose pride weighed more than Mount Rushmore and occupied acreage the size of South Dakota and Wyoming combined. God eventually reduced the man to the level of a cow for seven years. Such was the extent of the man’s ego. This seven year blaming session was like dismantling Mount Rushmore a stone at a time. Just when you think that seven years of madness in a field might be a little harsh, consider what God could have done. He could have detonated the equivalent of an atomic bomb under the man’s castle, or put scorpions in his bed, given him rickets, or confiscated his penis. Instead, He leaves his kingdom intact, his body intact, his family intact, and sends him off on a nice little vacation from sanity. He puts him out in a field eating grass with the cows. It’s not altogether unpleasant, I don’t think. I have seen some very content cows. I have always thought that cows have a fairly simple, fairly uncomplicated life. Bovine-envy, they call it. I think that their brains are the size of Brazil nuts. All cows have to do is chew and sleep, chew and sleep. Sometimes they low at the moon. If nativity scenes are to be believed, some cows even got to watch Jesus being born. I believe this bovine experience to have been an improvement over the Nebuchadnezzarian hassles of running the world—not a mere country, mind you, but the world.

FINE-TUNED BLAMING

The result of Nebuchadnezzar’s seven-year trial was that the man’s pride got reduced to the size of a small Fargo, North Dakota neighborhood. It became manageable. Some people don’t need seven years of madness. None of us have ever run the world; our pride starts relatively small so that it doesn’t take much to break us. Sometimes, all we need is a verse. God has made us such vessels of honor that we can read a single passage testifying to His sovereignty (passages such as Romans 11:36), bow to it, and not get blamed. No muss, no fuss. No swatting flies with our tails. We simply read great passages like this and say, “Wow, in the end we’re just helpless creatures in the hands of an almighty God.” I recommend this course, but only God decides who gets it the easy way. Vessels of dishonor might end up with their nose in manure for seven years. God does different things for different people, to the same result of salvation for all (1 Timothy 4:10).

Vessels of honor do smell better, however. This much I know. —MZ (Next week: “God’s will and intention.”)