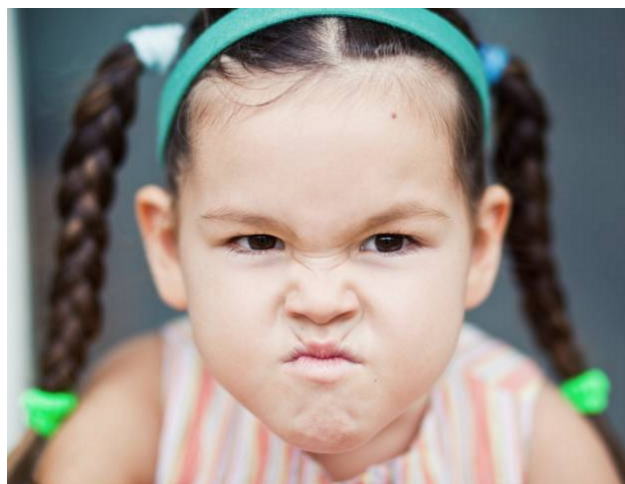


ROMANS Part 102

Chapter 11:6-8

The mechanics of unbelief.



Now if it is in grace, it is no longer out of works, else the grace is coming to be no longer grace. Now, if it is out of works, it is no longer grace, else the work is no longer work. 7 What then? What Israel is seeking for, this she did not encounter, yet the chosen encountered it. Now the rest were calloused, 8 even as it is written, God gives them a spirit of stupor, eyes not to be observing, and ears not to be hearing, till this very day.

GRACE VS. WORKS

The grace spoken of by Paul here is the grace of verse five that allows for any remnant among Israel to exist at all. This is not *our* grace. Our

grace is “transcendent” (2 Corinthians 9:14), which is to say that it takes complete unworthies into heaven and seats them at God’s right hand. It’s that wild and “over the top.” The grace of Romans 11:6 is limited to the context of God preserving a remnant in Israel that somehow still honors the patriarchal promises. The “somehow” of the preceding sentence is “by grace.” Not bad, but not exactly the stuff of transcendence. Grace is grace is grace; the definition never changes. Under discussion here is a difference in the quantity of grace, not the quality. Grace can be either doled out or lavished upon someone.

The grace that forgives a spouse, say, for adultery, is the same grace that offers someone a nut from a bag of cashews. It’s the volume of grace that changes, and the insistence with which it comes. Not only does grace come in different strengths (regular strength; improved strength; industrial strength), it is delivered in different volumes, either by a thimble, a bucket, or a high-pressure hose hooked up to an underground vat of the stuff. But why does Paul then compare this grace to works? Doesn’t he do that in *our* evangel?

It’s the same thing with works as with grace: there are different strengths, depths, volumes, and degrees of despicableness of it. If grace is measured by the context (is it a thimble or a vat?) and by qualifiers such as “transcendent” (as it is in our evangel), then so it is with works. In our evangel, the work against which grace shines is any activity of flesh attempting to justify itself in the sight of God. Now *that’s* ugly. This is the kind of work described by Paul in places like Romans 3:28—“For we are reckoning a man to be justified by faith apart from works of law.” The work here in Romans 11:6 is that which would steel itself against the tide of popular apostasy. This work is not trying to justify itself in the sight of God, but merely to resist a common temptation. Any resistance of *any* evil is futile apart from the enabling of God’s spirit, i.e. “grace.” But again, it’s a matter of degree.

IT GOES BOTH WAYS

Now if it is in grace, it is no longer out of works, else the grace is coming to be no longer grace. Now, if it is out of works, it is no longer grace, else the work is no longer work (Romans 11:6).

I like how Paul covers his bases with works and grace—I *sort of* like it. I'm tempted to hate it because of how poorly it reflects upon the intelligence of Paul's readers. I'm tempted to think that the apostle anticipates a day of monumental ignorance when people would fail to realize that grace and works diametrically oppose one another. Why does he have to point it out? Would anyone require an insistence that night is not day, and day is not night? Not with day and night, no, but when things take a religious/God turn, people for some reason begin to lose their minds. Now is when they require Paul's seemingly obvious and even primitive hammer-blast of logic. The tottering of the human mind occurs very quickly. The threat is real. The mind can go either way. The competing factions—truth and error—rush in to lay claim. Satan sprints to the scene to destroy the logic of Paul's "Grace is not law and law is not grace." This is mortal combat. Satan is hellbent upon disrupting any whiff of logic, while Paul is hellbent upon forwarding obvious but happy syllogisms.



When minds here on Earth begin turning toward God, Satan responds as though on a 9-1-1 call. I do the same thing for the side of truth, and many people do not understand this. The reality of the mortal combat escapes them. The people I speak of are either resting in their "God-will-be-all-in-all" hammocks, or they have their feet propped up in their "all-is-of-God" La-Z-Boy recliners. They can't see what I see and perhaps

refuse to know what I know because it hurts to compete. I suppose that it simply has not been given to them to compete. They are fatalists, really. They say, "God is in charge of everything, Zender, so why bother?" They fail to consider the example of Paul. Who knew more of the sovereignty of God and the outcome of the universe than the ex-Pharisee from Tarsus? Yet who rushes in faster to aid tottering minds? It is Paul. The man never loses awareness of the spiritual warfare set upon contemporary tables by God Himself.

My first priority is to hose the awakened mind with Paul's gospel: The sufficiency of Christ! I rush in with a hose-full of the stuff. Satan's first priority is to distract the awakened mind from the sufficiency of Christ by whisking the owner of the awakened mind into a church as soon as possible, where the sufficiency of Christ will be buried beneath sacraments, ceremonies, songs, special events, and doctrines of demons such as human free will. The awakened mind will be sung lullabies to and put back to sleep. Paul and I have the disadvantage here, for neither of us can offer anything as exciting as church and as soothing as a lullaby. Our greatest lure is Christ and the coming eon, which unfortunately is invisible now. Church, on the other hand, is as visible as a county fair. Church is where Satan has perfected the systematization of deception. Here is where the greatest lies against humanity flourish beneath the banner, "We love the truth." Church is a "happy home" where the most awful hypocrisies against humanity find asylum.

I.Q. ASKEW

In Romans 11:6, Paul then takes pessimism to the next level—if you ask me—by foreseeing a generation that would ask, "Paul, we understand that if a thing is of grace, then it can't be of works; that's obvious. But what if a thing is of *works* first? Is it possible that it could *then* be of grace?" This would be like asking, "An olive is not an aardvark, Paul, we all know that, but what's your opinion of the proposition that an *aardvark* could be an *olive*?" I grieve that Paul addresses this. That he addresses it confirms my fears concerning the general intelligence (or lack thereof) of Paul's readers. Or maybe it is rather their general susceptibility to Satan's subtle deceptions. The truth is that I don't think Paul *anticipates* such a day; I think he's *in* it. Paul's contemporaries were, apparently, this dull, this susceptible. If people were that dull then, how dull are they now? Dull as a broiled codfish? A platonic lover? A sheep? A Quaker meeting? At this late hour of Eon 3, Earth's inhabitants

rarely even read Paul, let alone misinterpret him. They can't even get to Romans to *be* dull; this is how dull they are. Or, if they do venture beyond Acts, they lump Paul's revelation in with the Circumcision. This amounts to not merely confusing law with grace ("Oops, I meant to say law, but I said grace"), but with thinking that law and grace could somehow be interchanged, as in, "Law *could* be grace, and grace *could* be law, depending on whether or not I'm in church listening to an obfuscating seminary graduate."

SEEK AND HIDE

"What then? What Israel is seeking for, this she did not encounter, yet the chosen encountered it. Now the rest were calloused, even as it is written, God gives them a spirit of stupor, eyes not to be observing, and ears not to be hearing, till this very day" (Romans 11:7-8).

Seeking is an active verb. In this case, it is the "works" of the context. Israel has tried desperately through the ages to find God, but most have missed Him by a mile (or a millimeter; same difference) because God hides Himself from them one degree more actively than they seek Him: check-mate. (Why does God *want* to win a game that stymies so many seekers? More on this in a moment.) In the film *No Intelligence Allowed*, Ben Stein asked the famous atheist Richard Dawkins, "What if you were to wake up someday to find that there has been a God all along?" Dawkins replied, "I would say, 'Sir, why did you take such pains to hide yourself?'" What a great answer. God does take pains to hide Himself, not just from atheists like Dawkins, but from Israel and all other brands of unbelievers.

ATHEISM AND OTHER ANOMALIES

Creation screams of a Creator. No one is born an atheist or agnostic. Normal instincts, left alone, acknowledge a Creator (Romans 1:20-21). One must *become* an atheist; intelligent hearts must be darkened (Romans 1:21) by an outside force. This outside force comes most commonly via troublesome Christians (sorry for the redundancy) so blinded by human tradition that they mistake their vindictive monster-deity (he eternally torments most of his creation), for the true God. Christians are God's worst PR nightmare, not that God has nightmares. If God really did lose control of His creation in Eden as popularly supposed, then certainly nightmares of the most discomfiting kind would beset Him continually. But seeing as though God has planned all of this from the beginning, including

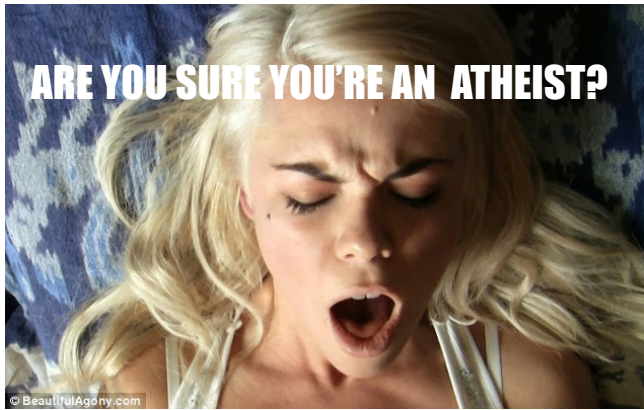
the supposed mistakes of Adam, God's downtimes are remarkably free of phantasms. "All is of God" (2 Corinthians 5:18). God loves this verse.

Christians are terrible evangelists. It's difficult to say who are the worst evangelists, Christians or Jews. I would not want to start a contest between them. Error simply changes clothes. The Jewish evangel is, "Jesus still hasn't come yet; can we interest you in a bagel, or a magazine subscription, or a New World Order?" The Christian evangel is, "Love God or else."



It is true that Christians never have grasped the true God, which is not ultimately their fault. God hides Himself from them just as He hides Himself from athe-

ists and Jews—moreso, even. I say moreso not only because I am suddenly enamored of this word today (grammatical correctness aside), but because, from atheists and Jews God hides Himself point-blank, while from Christians He hides Himself behind false images of Himself. This makes the Christians self-righteous (Jews are self-righteous as well but for different reasons) in that they claim Jesus to be one of them—just look at the pre-fab icon around their necks—but tragically *don't* have either Jesus *or* God on their sides. Because atheists tiptoe through the minefield of self-righteousness with few explosions, they are the most happy-go-lucky of all unbelievers. You will never find atheists condemning others while fondling Jesus jewelry and/or singing songs about “amazing grace.” The most hypocritical thing atheists do is say “Oh God!” during sex. Or they may (no, they *will*) “God bless” people who sneeze. I heard one atheist say, “Thank God I’m an atheist.” This makes atheists relatively pleasant to be around. The atheists studiously avoid church, which is one great advantage of not believing in God. Ironically, atheists never have rejected God. They have rejected the caricature-god presented them by the lunatic (and unfortunately loud) Christian contingent. The true God, they have never seen.



It’s always a close call, though, with the atheists. How can atheists insist upon their confession in a world *so* full of amazing life? Christians are fast, that’s how. Satan is fast, as previously mentioned, but he uses Christian hands to close the deal. (He doesn’t have hands, himself.) The Christians grab babies practically out of the womb and perform ceremonies on them. I refer to baptism. Some babies are forced to listen to bad translations of the Bible (the King James Version, for instance), in utero. This makes many of the babies kick their mommies in the ribs. Some Christian parents will take their



babies—who still have natural instincts concerning God for several hours, especially during breastfeeding sessions—to Wednesday night Bible studies, where the babies hear their first details concerning eternal torment. The babies (traumatized and in desperate need of breast milk) are then carried back into church every Sunday until the babies/atheists can’t take it any more and confess atheism either with their mouths or by expelling waste into their diapers. It is true that some babies become atheists so quickly that they still can’t talk yet (they’re not even a year old), so they either cry or shit themselves. Occasionally, both things happen simultaneously. This is why there are crying rooms in churches. This is why there are nurseries. This is why Huggies started a diaper business. Babies instinctively cry in church because of what is being done to them by Satan and their parents. The babies are basically mourning the death of their natural instincts. At this point, hope wanes. The hope is snuffed out completely at Summer Bible Camp.

ACTS OF GOD

God purposely withholds faith. It’s not just a matter of Him not giving it, it’s an action. He blocks it. Paul says in Romans 11:32 that “God locks up all together in stubbornness.” But wait. Isn’t stubbornness unbelief? Of course. Concerning unbelief, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4—

Now, if our evangel is covered, also, it is covered in those who are perishing, in whom the god of this eon blinds the apprehensions of the unbelieving so that the illumination of the evangel of the glory of Christ, Who is the Image of the invisible God, does not irradiate them.

Who does this thing, God or Satan? Ultimately, God does it. He uses Satan, however. God doesn't do this blocking of faith stuff directly because it's dirty business and it's odious to Him. It's a necessary evil, but He would rather use the hands of an intermediary. This is why God created Satan in the first place. Satan is the intermediary. Satan is God's "left hand man," you might say. You can now say by way of objection, if you so wish, "But I don't see Satan. Where is he? You say that he's rushing down to screw things up." He is. But he's generally invisible, just like God. He's a spiritual being and so he can hide himself via invisibility. He comes down fast, yes, but *from* God—ultimately—to affect human beings. "God locks up all together in stubbornness" (Romans 11:32). I didn't write this verse, I am merely explaining it. "But, Martin, what about Paul rushing to the scene as well? Doesn't Paul come rushing down from God as well?" Yes. Both Paul and Satan are rushing down, ultimately, from God, to wage war for the minds of struggling humans. It is of great spiritual importance to Paul to struggle against an adversary, and win. Unless there is an adversary to struggle against, then Paul can't win. Forget about winning; he can't even

**“Unless there is an adversary to
wrestle against, Paul can't even
compete, let alone win.”**

compete. Who provides the adversary? God does. It's this simple. God invents competing factions so that the good guys can win, or at least compete nobly. Without bad guys, there can be no good guys, and there can be no noble competing and possible winning. The bad guys will eventually become good guys (Colossians 1:20), but not until the good guys can wrestle against them and be rewarded for their service in combating evil. Part of me hates this spiritual warfare, but part of me is thankful for it because of what it produces in me and what will be my reward for engaging in it and not just sitting around like a fatalist watching it happen.

When my kids were small and wanted to be firemen, I used to create little fires in the front yard for them so that they could rush up to the fires in their little plastic fire-trucks and douse the fires with a garden hose. This is what God does for those of us who are engaged in this warfare, only the fires are demonic deceptions and the garden hose is Paul's gospel of grace and peace. God is doing this *for* us evangelist types, not to us. It is gracious of Him.

ROMANS 11:32

I did not write Romans 11:32. I can't take credit, or blame. How does God lock up all together in stubbornness so that people like Paul and yours truly can rush in by the spirit to undo the God-imposed stubbornness, as God intends us to? (Thanks for providing the stubbornness, God. No, seriously. I really do appreciate it. You lit the fire, and then You send me in with my gushing remedy.) I'm giving you a rare look at the chain of events. The process of unbelief starts with God sending down the command that all shall be locked up together in stubbornness and it ends with human beings administering the unbelief through God's intermediary (Satan) with their diabolical creeds that sound enlightened but that epitomize darkness. Satan is the middle-man. I think we've got the chain of command ironed out now. It's really not complicated but it is hard to believe because it so opposes the common conception of religion, where Satan is supposed to be "off the leash," and God is struggling to keep up with him, and maybe God will win, but maybe He won't. Well, He *won't* win because Satan ends up with a kingdom for eternity that rivals God's. This is the Christian "gospel."

God eventually has mercy on the same all that He locked up in stubbornness. This is a separate process, the mechanics of which will be discussed at another time. Actually, I discussed a lot of it back in Romans chapter ten.

This still begs the question of why God does all this. I've explained it many different ways throughout this series (and throughout the years), but I will be happy to try to think of a different way and do it with as few words as possible. Maybe this will end up being the best way I've ever done it, and maybe someone will be reached by my paragraph (I'll try to keep it to a paragraph) who has yet to enjoy the "aha" moment.

THE NECESSITY OF UNBELIEF

God locks up all (yes, I said "all") together in stubbornness so that He can then have mercy on the very same all at a later time. This is Romans 11:32 again. The joy of mercy and deliverance and grace and peace and love and "aha" moments can only exist *after* extended and frustrating periods of condemnation, bondage, law, disquietude and hand-wringing over creation. Then, when the truth hits, it feels like you've landed on a feather bed and people are fanning you and feeding you

grapes and massaging your feet. Do you know how good it feels when you take off a pair of uncomfortable shoes at the end of a hot day? All right then. That's it. It's that times ten-thousand. Nothing could possibly feel better. This good feeling would be impossible apart from the preceding bad feelings. The preceding bad feelings are necessary, but temporary. Once they have served their purpose, God takes away the bad feelings. Your stupid shoes are discarded, never to be seen again. But the good stuff produced via the bad feelings (your feet getting massaged and the fresh air hitting your feet), never goes away. It stays forever. The bad stuff ("God locks all together in stubbornness") lasts only a relatively short time, while the good stuff ("that He should be merciful to all") lasts forever. This will eventually happen for every human ever created.

Wow. I don't think I've ever explained it better and with fewer words. I love the shoe analogy. I wonder why I never thought of it before. Take that, Satan. Take that, Pastor Dave. —MZ

THE REMNANT

(From a recent email exchange.)

FIRST EMAIL, TO ME: "Martin, I personally believe that our calling is coming to full fruition soon. And so, as you said, God is silencing His witnesses of grace (us), more and more as He is preparing the stage for Israel's remnant to take the place that we have held as the spokespeople of God. The body of Christ will be taken out of the midst, and then God will finally inaugurate the kingdom for Israel."

I FORWARDED THIS EMAIL TO A FRIEND, WHO WROTE: "This is precisely what I have been thinking for some time now—that God is silencing us. Look how fractured the Body has become, even since I started believing in 1993. Look at your own experiences. The Body is falling by the wayside—you know it is. Not to say there aren't a few hot-spots left, but it's practically a 'skeleton crew' by this time. The end of the age is ravaging us. Yet there is a remnant among us as well. The next act—Israel—is about to become front-and-center, after we are gone. I hope so much, as we all do, that the Body is about to come into its glory."

"YOUR RECENT ARTICLE ABOUT SEX"



Hi Martin, I just want to thank you for your recent article about sex. (Vol. 5, Issue 37: "The Source of Sexual Power.") I have to say that it was very enlightening. I am still trying to process what you wrote, but as always, you have certainly given me lots to think about. As a female, I must admit that I have never viewed myself as having any sort of power in my relationships with men. I am not being falsely modest...I know that I am considered attractive. I have seen women who seem to know that they have some power over guys and they use it to get whatever they want in a selfish way. As a woman who truly cares what God wants me to be, I have often waited for the guy to take the lead. My ex was controlling and seemed insecure. And I would probably describe myself as a bit of a doormat. That was a long time ago, when I was a church-going doormat! What you have written makes me think that there is a world full of guys who often ignore their female counterparts because they may be put off by this longing that you describe that is so *in* them...perhaps they think it is weakness. But doesn't that also speak volumes about how people often ignore God as though it shows their weakness and lack of 'control' in this life?

Anyhow, you are making me think about the dynamics of my relationship with my husband. (I am happily remarried.) I need to let what you said sink in. This information is powerful. For me, it has the potential to make a good thing better. Thank you again, Martin! I look forward to reading more from you about the roles of the sexes, and of the role of sex itself. I hope that you are doing well. I have to tell you that sometimes I worry about you. Once in a while, on your Revelation Series, you remind me of the the Tom Hanks character in *Castaway*, talking to Wilson, the volleyball. Sorry...I hope that you are getting out and making connections, and not spending too much time talking to your micro-phone. Wishing you the best...



Two of my three sons: Gabe (in the fire truck) and Luke. This was probably the fall of 1993, when I used to make little fires in buckets for them to put out with the garden hose.