

“Help my unbelief!”

Someone brought a demon-possessed boy to Jesus’ disciples, but none of the twelve could heal him. Jesus said, “Bring him to Me,” (Mark 9:19). The desperate father approached Jesus and said: “If Thou art in any way able, help us, having compassion on us!”

Jesus answered:

Why the if? You are able to believe. All is possible to him who is believing. —Mark 9:23

The father was pretty sure that he believed. But then again, he wasn’t *real* sure. He thought he probably *did* believe, but on the other hand, did he understand what belief even was? If he stopped to analyze it, he probably doubted more than he believed. All this noise ran through the father’s head. I love his eventual answer, and I think Jesus did, too:

I am believing! Help my unbelief! —Mark 9:24

What honesty. The man is desperate to believe, but admits that full persuasion eludes him. Here is the Zender paraphrase:

Of course I believe! I’m also a liar. Help!

Yet, it was good enough for Jesus, Who healed the son.

Got faith? Great! Does it sometimes waver like wheat in the wind? *Good enough.* God loves honesty. If you want to pretend, join a Pentecostal church. ■

I have total faith that my wife thinks I’m hot!



Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

“If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong” --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

Can unbelief nullify God’s faithfulness?

A default belief of the Christian religion is that human faithlessness is stronger than God:

GOD WANTS TO BLESS YOU, BUT IF YOU FAIL TO BELIEVE HE CAN BLESS YOU, GOD IS HELPLESS TO ACT UPON HIS INTENTION.

Is this true? Let’s test it with Israel, the industry standard for unbelief. The following is from 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! Now let God be true, yet every human 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.”

We are saved by faith, not sight, but the Jews of history witnessed miracles by the day. In spite of that, many disbelieved. Paul then asks: “Will their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God?” It’s a good question. The fear that unbelief could possibly nullify God’s faithfulness is what keeps churches in business. Churches are like service stations that keep the faith-tank filled. Whenever one gets low on faith, off one goes to church.

What would happen to service stations if we each had our own supply of free fuel at home? Likewise, what would happen to churches if they advertised the fact that human unbelief could *never* nullify the faithfulness of God? Do you think that a passage such as the one above—which *eliminates* human effect upon divine intention—would ever see the light of day?

Churches thrive upon the lie that God loses sleep over human failure. The lie that Divine enterprise totters right along with human faith keeps poor, faithless people pulling up to “the pumps” once a week for a re-charge. For an institution making its living keeping people from backsliding, backsliding must be presented as the worst potential tragedy of the eons.

Paul is so appalled by the very suggestion that human disbelief could outmuscle God’s faithfulness, that he practically shouts from the page:

“May it not be coming to that!” Then he says:

Let God be true, yet every human a liar.

If *everyone* disbelieves, God still gets what He wants. More startling still is knowing that not even out-and-out lies faze God. Good thing, because Christianity is one continual, unadulterated stream of falsehood.



My dream for all churches.

That so Thou shouldst be justified in Thy sayings, And shalt be conquering when Thou art being judged.

God is in fact being judged by the people of so-called “faith” whenever they promote their “disbelief-is-stronger-than-God’s-faithfulness” doctrine. Here is just one of God’s sayings that He will be justified in making:

Faithful is the saying and worthy of all welcome (for for this are we toiling and being reproached), that we rely on the living God, Who is the Saviour of all humankind, especially of believers. —1 Tim. 4:9-10

Christians boldly disbelieve this. *They* actually believe (are you ready for this?) that God is in fact the Tormentor of *most* of humanity, and that He saves *only* believers. Will the unbelief of Christianity nullify the faithfulness of God? May it not be coming to that!

Of all people, Christians will be the most thankful to discover that there is no such thing as eternal torment. When Christians stand before God in full realization (finally) that they spent their days and earned their bread by lying about Him, they will feel thankful to have escaped the fiction that they so wished upon others. ■

God gifts Himself with the present of faith.

Faith delights God. He loves it when people believe Him. Human faith neither makes nor breaks Him, but He imparts it to us anyway (Romans 12:3), because He loves how it feels when we return it to Him.

Let's say you keep dropping hints to loved-ones that you want a blue, cashmere sweater for your birthday. Everyone knows this is what you want, and it's a running joke for the weeks leading up to the big day. When your birthday finally arrives, you already know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are getting a blue, cashmere sweater. *Sure enough.* And yet, when you finally open the package, you are overjoyed to get a blue, cashmere sweater. You hug your family members and say, "It's just what I wanted! Thank you!"

This is precisely how it works with God and faith. Yet you will need to know that faith is, indeed, a gift that God *first* gives us:

For to you it is graciously granted, for Christ's sake, not only to be believing on Him, but to be suffering for His sake also. —Phil. 1:29

Now that He has graciously granted us belief ("belief" is from the same Greek root word as "faith"), He empowers us to return it to Him. When we do, it delights Him to such a degree that one would never suspect it was His gift to us in the first place.

Watch this marvel at work in the following two verses:

We are thanking God always concerning you all, making mention of you in our prayers, unintermittingly remembering your work of faith and toil of love and endurance of expectation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in front of our God and Father. —1 Thess. 1:2-3

There are three things here for which Paul is congratulating the Thessalonians:

- ▶ Their work of faith
- ▶ Their toil of love
- ▶ Their endurance of expectation

Anyone reading might at this point mistakenly assume divine reliance upon human contribution. This is why we must keep reading:

"... of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Do you see? The human work of faith, and toil of love, and endurance of expectation, was *of* the Lord Jesus Christ. These things came *from* Him, and thus were only in a relative sense the toil, work, and endurance of the Thessalonians. The Thessalonians merely offered back to the Lord Jesus Christ His own gift. Does this keep Paul from acknowledging the vessels? No; no more than receipt of the expected sweater keeps the birthday girl from hugging her family.

Who ultimately gets the thanks? The same One responsible for everything; verse 1:

We are thanking God always concerning you all. ■



God will one day fulfill His promise to Israel.

HE WILL BE SAVING HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS.

In **Matt. 1:20-21**, a messenger of the Lord appears to Joseph, saying:

Joseph, son of David, you may not be afraid to accept Miriam, your wife, for that which is being generated in her is of holy spirit. Now she shall be bringing forth a Son, and you shall be calling His name Jesus, for He shall be saving His people from their sins.

Following this promise, God plunges Israel—for the remainder of the book of Matthew and beyond—into the pit of unbelief. Will Israel's unbelief then nullify Matthew 1:21? To hear the church teach it: *Absolutely.* In the face of human unbelief, most people subject *all* of God's promises to potential failure.



May it not be coming to that!

That so Thou shouldst be justified in Thy sayings, And shalt be conquering when Thou art being judged. —Rom. 3:4

Doubting God's words is akin to *judging* Him. How stupidly fearless are the people who habitually do this.

God conquers human unbelief.

Some assume God has abandoned every promise to Israel—or else figuratively fulfilled these promises in another people. Even those who still acknowledge the nation's future glory doubt that God will eventually save every last Israelite.

God says, concerning Christ:

"He shall be saving His people from their sins."

Religion says:

No, He won't.

I wonder who is right? ■

Is faith coerced?

Does God *make* people believe in Him? Divine imperative is the essence of Romans 12:3—

God *parts* to each the measure of faith.

Does God impart faith by invading our world and whacking us upside the head? That's what He did with Paul, and Paul called his arrest on the Damascus road:

"... a pattern of those about to be believing on Him ..." —1 Tim. 1:16

God's faith-invasion is rarely that obvious, but always that true. Re-read Romans 12:3; the word "parts" is an active verb.

Few people believe God saves like this.

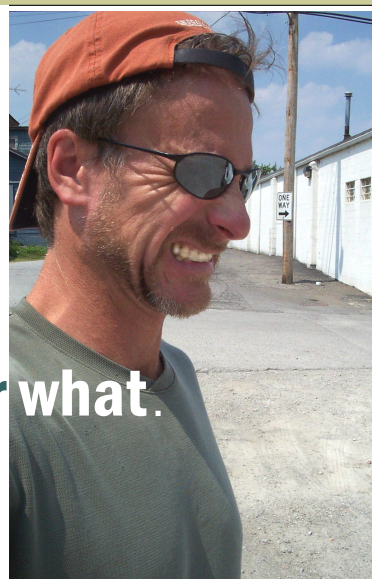
Oh, well. ■



Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur (Philippians 2:14). Therefore, I shall rant.

God will do what He says, no matter what.



As I recently shared with you, the worst nightmare of my life occurred when my wife of 26 years decided—with no scriptural grounds—to end our marriage. I did everything in my power to change her mind, but her resolve was horrifying.

One Sunday afternoon—May, 2009—brought me to depths of agony I could never have imagined. I lay naked, spread-eagled on the floor of the apartment I had been exiled to, staring through the ceiling into the eyes of God. I challenged Him to run a sword through my chest. The thought of the sound and the feel of the blade cracking my rib-cage brought deep, settling peace. Any pain from the fatal blow would pale before the emotional trauma of spending another day, alive, apart from my wife.

“I did not fear death. Life was what I feared.”

I did not fear death. Life was what I feared.

I knew God had heard me. Many celestial eyes gazed down through the ceiling. I felt no shame. I gave God five minutes. I was only human. No trial had taken me except what was human. My request to die, then, was familiar. The blood would also belong to my race. The exit of my spirit from my body would be human as well. Since it was all so God-damned human, *let it come*, I said, *since human is what I am*.

Five minutes passed; I continued to live. I resigned myself; He had had His chance. I reasoned, then, that He

Who was able to end my life, purposely had not. Apparently, He wanted me alive.

A new measure of faith came. I knew that He Who tried me was the Same Who would extricate me also. I believed Romans 8:28 all over

again—that all worked together for good. And this:

No trial has taken you except what is human. Now, faithful is God, Who will not be leaving you to be tried above what you are able, but, together with the trial, will be making the sequel also, to enable you to undergo it. —1 Cor. 10:13

The sequel *then* was the knowledge that good would come. The sequel *now* is that, nearly two years subsequent to this trial, the promised good has arrived.

I am the happiest man alive, now.

In two weeks, I will tell you about it. ■

Abraham and Isaac: Ridiculous faith

In Genesis, chapter 22, God asks Abraham to take his promised son, Isaac, to a mountain in Moriah, lay him on a pile of wood on an altar, and run a knife into his heart. Had this command come from any mouth other than that of the Most High God, the “criminally insane” charge would have held in court.

Ever hear of ridiculous faith? Of trusting God no matter what? Here is your poster boy.

How could Abraham have done this? He trusted God’s ability to raise the dead. He knew that this was the promised son, and that not

even death could undo God’s promise.

We modern “believers,” on the other hand, imagine that mere unbelief can dash God’s plans. Our faith in God is nowhere near ridiculous. No, it is not even normal.

At the last moment, God stayed Abraham’s arm. Moses would later record this scene—of belief in a God stronger than circumstance—and the world would promptly forget it. ■

