



ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

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God is just not all that fascinated by us.

I hate to break it to some people, but God is way more fascinated by Christ than by them.

“The disposition of the flesh is enmity to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither is it able. Now those who are in flesh are not able to please God” (Romans 8:7-8).

Religious people like to grandstand for God, as though they are auditioning for Him and hoping to get to the next round of some holiness competition. The grandstanding includes personal sacrifice and acts of great asceticism. I am thinking now of the Buddhists who sit in prayer poses for hours and sometimes days until their butt muscles crack. I am thinking of

Filipinos who shred their own backs with whips and nail themselves to crosses. I am thinking of a woman I know named Rosemary Tai who attends Mass not just on Sundays but seven (yes, seven!) days a week. She loves the ringing of the altar bells and how her knees feel after ten minutes on a kneeler. She loves how she thinks God feels about her. I am thinking of my friend Jimmy Roy sitting in a corner of his bedroom praying three times a day—6, noon and 6—hoping for God to notice his consistency. He wonders why others can't get into the habit. “Other people are too lazy,” he tells me.

These are but the opening, bizarre acts of religious lives spent trying to please God. This same God, however, could not be more pleased than He already is—with His Son, Jesus Christ. And good thing for the race, He sees the race through the prism of what His Son did for it, which is why He is now conciliated to the world (2 Corinthians 5:19). The world has never heard this, thus they continue to bust their knees on kneelers and shred their backs with whips. The only thing now that displeases God is the all-out effort to please Him.

GOD'S PRIVATE LOVEFEST

If I may congratulate myself here, this is a great point. God is staring at Christ. It is a pervasive stare. God is infatuated with His Son. Who did more to please Him—us or Jesus? (Hm. Let me draw up our respective deeds on a graph and get back with you.) Jesus Christ obeyed His Father's will to the bitter end against ridiculous opposition. He could have sinned a thousand times, but didn't do it once. Satan tempted Him with fleshly commodities and earthly kingdoms, yet Jesus turned up His nose at all of it, saying that He preferred every Word emerging from the mouth of God; *that* moved the heart of the Father. Then came the Garden of Gethsemane—here was a rock, blood, tears, desperate pleas, and one last opportunity to escape The Plan. Jesus Christ set forth



His case, but He “unfortunately” ended everything with, “Not my will, but Yours be done”—and that was the ballgame. He went forward with the nightmare because it was what God wanted. (God knew that the ends would justify the means.) Then came the cross, which was the worst thing that anyone has ever endured because not only was Jesus Christ nailed to a post naked having been scourged with bone-tipped whips. (Unlike the Filipinos, other people did it to Him.) Then, His sacrificial Self was mocked by the church leaders while Satan celebrated his “triumph.” As if these things were not enough, the sins of the universe pushed Him so deep into the stake that He was forced to cry in despair, thinking that His own Father had abandoned Him. All He had to do was come off the cross and kill everyone, but instead He drank the vinegar they offered Him and declared, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

Do we wonder now why God stares at His Son lovingly? Do we wonder how God is able to restrain His enthusiasm for our little juggling acts and sword-swallowing routines? Jesus Christ went to the cross, and we’re juggling citrus fruit. Wow. We’re praying three times a day, backs against our beds, with dinner cooking downstairs. Wow. Why isn’t God staring at *us*?

The news that “those who are in flesh are not able to please God,” ought to be celebrated, not shunned. Should anyone be disappointed in such a gospel, perhaps he or she should face a mirror three times a day—at 6, noon and 6— and say, “Just who the hell do I think I am?”

“PRAYING JIMMY” IS NOT HAPPY

Jimmy (my praying friend) will say, “Wait a minute, if I’m not able to please God, then what is the use of the good things I try to do?”

I want to say, “Exactly, Jimmy!” but I get Jimmy’s lament. It’s the same lament as those who say, “Since you’re telling me that I can just go out and murder people and still be saved, then what’s the use of my not murdering people?” I had no idea how hard it was for some people to not kill fellow human beings, or impress God with their dexterity with citrus fruit. The common denominator in this department of complaint is the misapprehension that God stares at us instead of at Christ. It all comes down to that. Complainers like the ones I have just described think that God is living and dying on hourly newsbreaks of their behavior. They think that their daily activity shows up in God’s computer on a Dow Jones Industrial-like graph that rises

and falls with the success or failure of their acts. The graph dips and spikes—look at that! God can’t take His eyes off it! God either bangs His head against His desk in utter disappointment, or He fist-pumps an angel that Jimmy has kept his prayer promise.

We ought to get over it. God is staring at Jesus Christ’s stock graph, not ours.



GOOD BEHAVIOR

So why do killjoys like the apostle Paul exhort us to good behavior? Paul’s plea for good behavior seeks another source of inspiration besides, “I’ve got to please God.” The inspiration now, subsequent to Calvary, is a thankfulness toward God for being so pleased with Christ. Some of us had earthly fathers whom it was impossible to please. This poor experience infects its unhappy victims with the thought that God must be the same. He’s not. God has accepted us, flaws and all, through Christ. The joy of this realization is what now inspires us to ideal acts. It is no longer a matter of “do this or else,” but of “do this out of a spirit of appreciation that you’re no longer required to do it.”

Is it reverse psychology? Oh, sure. God is the One Who invented the way humans think. Threaten a man, and he rebels. Love him, and he serves. God has so thoroughly loved us through Christ that the possibility of failing Him no longer exists. Knowing this, we walk with confidence—some of us even dance—down the long, winding roads of life. And what do you know: we become better people. God *will* take His eyes from Christ to see such happy displays.

Besides Christ, nothing pleases God more than thankful hearts. —MZ

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