



Random Thoughts, Vol. 4

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If this “Random Thoughts” column is new to you, then here is a quick introduction. Below is a collection of my own observations, thoughts, and insights which may or may not prove to be a blessing to others. Each of these is not long enough to warrant an entire article on its own, but begged to be written down.¹

On The Laws of Men

8/20/2010

One of the ways that sinful man demonstrates his utter contempt for the sovereignty of God is in passing laws, ordinances, or decrees which go against the laws of Heaven. It is part of God's dominion to exercise His sovereignty by giving laws (Ten Commandments for instance). To not obey that law is a breach of His holy will and is an act of rebellion against His sovereignty and right of government.

It is a further act of treason for princes and governments to mint laws and pass legislation that is contrary to the laws of Heaven or to the moral character of God, or which violates God's rule.

Speaking on the dominion of God, Stephen Charnock wrote, *“It is part of God's sovereignty to be a Lawgiver; not to obey His law is a breach made upon His right of government; but it is treason in any against the crown of God, to mint laws with a stamp contrary to that of Heaven, whereby they renounce their due subjection, and vie with God for dominion, snatch the supremacy from Him, and account themselves more lords than the Sovereign Monarch of the world. . . . So foolishly fond are men to put themselves in the place of God, and usurp a jurisdiction over men's consciences: and to presume that laws made against the interest and command of God,*

*must be of more force than the laws of God's enacting.”*² For instance, Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden statue to be worshiped and adored and required all to bow down in homage. Such a law usurped the right of God to be worshiped and forced men to violate the law of God. Nebuchadnezzar's decree was an act of treason against the sovereignty of God. He elevated himself to divine status and set himself up as an equal to God.

Darius's decree that no god but Darius should be petitioned for thirty days was an attack on the dominion and laws of God. It cut contrary to the will and rule of Heaven.

Both Darius and Nebuchadnezzar were God-ordained rulers. Their power was ordained by God and those men were made rulers by the will of God. Yet they used their God-given authority to pass laws that undermined the rule of Heaven and attack the dominion of God. They, and all others who do likewise, will receive judgment for their crime of contempt against the sovereignty of God.

Those who legislate—whether in our country by the will of the people through general election, or in any country by whatever human means they received their office—will be held accountable before the bar of God for writing, voting for, signing, or enforcing laws which are unjust, unrighteous, and contrary to the law of God or the will of Heaven. They will receive their judgment. They will stand before the throne of God and their motives will be revealed. Their complicity in rebellion against the dominion of God will be tried, and they will receive the penalty due to rebels.

¹ With this volume I have started to date each entry.

² Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God, Vol. 2*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986) pgs 431-432.

Could this be a sign of aging?

10/5/2010

While cutting my hair some time ago, my wife said something that almost stopped my heart: "Hold still while I trim your eyebrow." What? Eyebrow? Don't you mean eyebrows? Since when do I only have one? Looking in the mirror closely - not something I do often, which is obvious from my appearance - I noticed to my horror that my eyebrows are seeking to become "no longer two, but one flesh" forever blurring the distinction between them. They are running toward each other like two long-separated lovers being reunited! It seems they saw a picture of Bert from Sesame Street and thought this was something they should aspire to. This has to stop!

Why, at the age of 38, do I have a nose hair trimmer? I started needing that little blessing a couple of years back. I am convinced that nose hair trimmers would not have been necessary before the fall. Only the curse could account for having to trim hairs that do not even have the decency to grow **outside** your body.

A few months ago, I met a man (nobody who comes to our church or ever has) that had hairs growing out of his ears! It was thick. So thick it was the first thing I noticed. It looked as if he was using small poodles for ear plugs. I thought to myself, "Well, with the approaching unibrow and the constant battle of the snoz follicles, I'd better keep an eye on my ear hair, too. It won't be long before I need to start waxing the inside of my ears." I have to confess, I never thought I would hear myself say that.

A couple hours later, I happened by a mirror and paused to take one of those rare close looks at myself and guess what? That's right! My ears think they want in on the "Hey, let's grow hair in unsightly places" game, too! They are a little behind my nose (in more ways than one) and certainly not as aggressive as my brows, but they are shaping up to be a clear and present danger before too long.

Here's to eternal vigilance in the battle against unwanted hair!

On God's Providence: Football and Europe

10/6/2010

Something I have wanted to do for a few years is to take all my kids to a live NFL football game at Candlestick Park in San Francisco. With my mom's offer to pay for gas and hotels for the trip down and back, that finally became something that was marginally feasible for us.

Looking over the NFL schedule of home games at

Candlestick for the season, I selected the October 17th game against Oakland (across-the-bay rival) as an ideal date for a trip to visit family and take in a game. Tickets went on sale on July 24th at 10:00 a.m.

I wanted to make sure that I went online to purchase tickets as soon as they became available so as not to miss this opportunity. Tickets to all the other games were available, but not for the October 17th game. After thirty minutes of waiting and searching, it became obvious that tickets for that game were not going on sale. They weren't even available. After multiple calls to my Bay Area family to arrange the visit, we had to push our trip out to November 21st, which was a game against Tampa Bay.

Needless to say, we were disappointed. We know a lot of Raiders fans and I was hoping to see my Niners beat them at Candlestick. October 17th seemed like the ideal time to take off for the trip. It was a bit of a letdown, but hey, we were going to the game.

About a month after that, Diedre's sister offered to fly Diedre and me to Vienna, Austria, paying for airfare and hotel for 5 days. That was an offer we could not turn down. We jumped on it in a heartbeat!

The dates for that trip were not flexible, since we were joining her sister in Vienna and her sister's vacation was already planned. When did we have to leave? **October 15th**. Needless to say, my disappointment was turned to joy at God's hand of Providence.

If the tickets had been available for the 17th, I would have bought them and planned my trip. Then I would have either had to sell the tickets and skip the game, or miss the opportunity to go to Vienna. God blessed me with both—the game and Vienna.

How often do I respond with frustration, disappointment or outright anger when my wants, desires, and expectations go unfulfilled? How often do we respond with anxiety or impatience when what we think is best goes unrealized? More importantly, how often are our unrealized desires, wants, and expectations actually working out for us far better than we know?

In this instance, I got a glimpse into God's providential guidance. I was allowed to see why God, in His providence, denied me what I desired on October 17th. That is not always the case. Yet how many countless times has the Lord denied me my desires knowing that giving me what I wanted would have kept me from something better? He is not obligated to reveal to us the secret workings of His providence, but we are obligated to trust Him as He works them out.

God denied me something lesser so that He might give me something greater. And to think that I was disappointed with it and responded with frustration! If God is working all things for His glory and my good, and if it is true that what is most for my good is most for God's glory, then my frustration over unrealized expectations can only come from my ignorance of His plan in denying them to me. So here is the lesson I need to learn: my disappointment is an indication of my ignorance. For if I knew what God knows, I would not be disappointed at all, but overflowing with gratitude.

Our Moral Superiority?

11/2010

During our last family trip to visit Diedre's parents in Saskatchewan, we made a quick day trip out to the city of Moose Jaw (No joke. There really is such a city.) and visited a tourist attraction we had heard much about and always wanted to see—the Moose Jaw Tunnels.³ One of the tunnels we toured was used to house an underground operation of immigrant workers—Chinese slave labor. As we toured from room to room, our over-dramatic tour guide explained how Chinese were brought over the ocean by the thousands and promised prosperity for them and their families. They were then forced to work in horrible conditions for almost nothing. They were called “Coolies”—a slang derogatory term. They were fed next to nothing and had to work for sometimes decades before they earned their freedom. They were bought and sold like common property.

Toward the end of the tour, the guide explained how the Canadian government had passed legislation to regulate this trade, often denying citizenship because of their ethnicity, and enabling this business of human trafficking. I couldn't help but think of America's past human rights abuses of the same order. As the tour guide continued, she explained how today, we have seen the evil of our past and the error of our ways, and we are not like those horrible lawmakers and people of bygone generations, who countenanced and supported and were silent in the face of such abuse.

I could almost feel a palpable sentiment of moral superiority in the room as we all were given reason to feel so good about our own enlightened treatment of our fellow man.

Then a light came on in my own mind. What about the unborn? Are we really greater than past generations? Do

we not treat unborn human beings worse than past generations treated slaves? We have an entire class of human persons today that are not afforded equal protection under law. They are murdered silently for profit (Planned Parenthood) and convenience. Their exploitation is protected by legislation.

Is this generation really morally superior to prior generations? I think not. Like prior generations, this one has put clean-sounding names on the abuse; names like “choice,” “women's health,” and “reproductive freedom.” They protect their holocaust by passing laws, denying protection, and intimidating people into silence.

But oh, the sense of moral superiority when we look at those who have gone before and say, “How could they have been so evil, selfish, and morally blind? How could they have made such laws and protected such abuse? How could they have treated persons like that?” I pray that some future generation (soon) will look at this generation with the same sense of disdain and contempt for allowing the murder of the unborn in our midst.

The Blessing of Sparse Blessings

2/28/2011

The blessings we tend to take most for granted are the small ones, the common ones, those we so frequently enjoy. One of the ways that God reminds us of how blessed we are is by removing some blessings from us. There is no time that we are as thankful for our jobs as when that source of provision is threatened or removed. There is no time that we are so thankful for a spouse, child, or friend as when some disease or danger threatens to snatch them from us.

Stephen Charnock notes, “*If we had blessings more sparingly, we should remember Him more gratefully. If He had sent us a bit of bread in a distress by a miracle, as He did to Elijah by the ravens, it would have stuck longer in our memories; but the sense of daily favors soonest wears out of our minds, which are as great miracles as any in their own nature, and the products of the same power; but the wonder they should beget in us, is obscured by their frequency.*”⁴

So seasons of sparsity in blessing direct our hearts toward God and remind us of the abundance of His blessings. This sparsity of blessings, the removal of them, is a blessing of another kind.

⁴ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence And Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) pg. 371.

³ <http://www.tunnelsofmoosejaw.com>

A New JW Approach?

3/14/2011

Recently I had an interesting encounter with a Jehovah's Witness. If this had not been the second such encounter, I would probably not even be mentioning it. The Jehovah's Witnesses showed up at my house on Super Bowl Sunday this year (2011) with their normal literature. It struck me as a bit odd, since I don't recall ever receiving a visit on a Sunday. I remember it was Super Bowl Sunday because I was donning my football gear in preparation for the big game. Since we had people waiting on us, I didn't have the time to talk at length as I normally like to.

They mentioned that they had previously been to my house and talked with my oldest daughter (14) and they said that she openly discussed "spiritual things" with them. I'm not sure what she told them, but they thought that it was worth a second visit. Since I was in a hurry, I dispensed with my normal formalities and the conversation went something like this:

Me: "Our family does attend worship services regularly. We attend the church in Kootenai. There is a key difference between what you believe and what we believe. See, I believe that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh. I believe in the Deity of Christ. You do not."

Them: "We do believe that Jesus was a god. So we are really not that far apart." (I was almost stunned speechless. I could not believe what I just heard. I have never had a Witness at my door say such a thing.)

Me: "We couldn't be further apart than we are. To believe that Jesus is 'a god' and to believe that Jesus is God are two entirely different things."

Them: "That is not a lot of difference. We probably agree on more than we would disagree on."

Me: "If I thought that Jesus was a car mechanic named Barry who lived in Detroit, would you say we are really close to each other in what we believe?"

Them: "No. Obviously not."

Me: "Well, you believe Jesus was created. I believe He is the uncreated Creator. You believe Jesus had a beginning. I believe He is eternal. You believe He is less than the Father. I believe He is equal to the Father. Our beliefs are not in any way similar."

Them: "We both believe the Bible to be the Word of God. We both believe in God. The differences are really not substantial."

Now, if you are familiar with Jehovah's Witness theology and have spent any time talking with Witnesses, then you can see just how odd this conversation was. The thing that makes this so noteworthy to me is that this is the second such conversation I have had like this.

In all my previous conversations with Witnesses, I have found them to stand their ground and not attempt at all to gloss over the theological differences. In all previous experiences, once they found out that I believe the doctrine of the Trinity or the Deity of Christ, they became very firm, stern, and displayed just a little (very little, but noticeable) hostility. They didn't hesitate to say that I was wrong, or to acknowledge the obvious differences between our theologies. Until recently, I have never had a Jehovah's Witness try to insist that we share common ground once I have confronted them with Jesus' claims to Deity.

This makes me wonder what is going on within the Watchtower organization. It seems to be one of the following:

1. First, it might be that I just so happened to have encountered two consecutive groups of Jehovah's Witnesses who are "liberal" in their theology or at best uneducated. I suppose this is *possible*, though I don't think it is likely. Typically, the lesser trained, newer Witnesses are paired up with the more seasoned and educated veterans. Also, the chances of finding one Witness who minimizes their differences with Trinitarians is slim, let alone two in a row.

2. Second, the whole local JW group is becoming liberal and post-modern. Again, not likely.

3. Third, it might signal a change in the way Jehovah's Witnesses are approaching people at the door. (I am going to put my money on this one!)

Here is what I mean. The Mormon (LDS) Church has made tremendous inroads into evangelical Christianity by trying to make themselves look as much like orthodox believers as possible. Just look at the Glenn Beck-led "revival meetings" of recent months for evidence of this. Evangelicals have largely accepted Mitt Romney and Glenn Beck as one of their own, glossing over and even ignoring the differences in theology. This has only been possible because of the decades-long effort of the LDS Church to convince people that they are a Christian denomination.

The Mormon Church has spent decades recasting itself as "evangelical," and "Christian." They have ignored

the doctrinal differences on essential issues between historic Christianity and Mormonism. Their efforts have paid off in spades, as most Christians are ignorant of Mormon doctrine and consider the differences minor if not unnoticeable. The result: widespread acceptance of Mormonism as a “Christian” religion.

Could the JW's be adopting a similar tactic? Might we be seeing a shift in their “witnessing” method? By emphasizing the “common ground” and “common beliefs” and “similar theology,” they will undoubtedly be able to woo unsuspecting people into their fold; people who believe that they have just joined another “Christian” denomination.

I am not sure if this is what we are seeing or not. I am most certainly going to test the waters next time I encounter a Jehovah's Witness and see if they try to minimize the differences again. If they do, I am going to ask them outright—“Why the new approach?” and, “Is this a local change or something that the Watchtower has encouraged?” This should be interesting to watch.

Without Wax -

