

Chapter 23

“And In Conclusion”

How does one conclude the story of his life? By his demise? A few rumors have indicated its occurrence. Maybe it has happened and I am just slow to catch on. At least on the farm it would be said that I am so slow that the dead lice are dropping off of me. They say that wine is made better by age. If the same is true of people, then I am almost perfect!

When I started this project I cannot remember having any specific point to prove or conclusion to reach. My aim was primarily to preserve some data for those in future generations who may share my genes. I mentioned various elements in our lives with which each must deal in determining the course of life – the differing grit in our gizzards. I have not attributed all actions and reactions to the intervention or providence of God. In concluding this series, let us explore this aspect a bit more.

Kind responses from many of you outside my tribe have led me to recognize an added value to sharing my story, that is, that we can recognize a marvelous commonality, even though each of us is shaped differently by the various factors with which we have dealt individually. When we are not competing we can embrace one another in recognition of brotherhood. Though from different nations and cultures we can have mutual sympathy if we do not let envy, suspicion, and malice lead us to ignore and deny that brotherhood. Somewhere I read, “No man is wiser than man.” No individual or group should become so conceited as to think they can outgrow and discard the wisdom derived historically through the commonality of mankind.

As you have read you have identified the particular gizzard stones and menu that have worked in you. In a self-centered way I have pointed out many of those, whether pleasant or painful, that I am able to recognize. Shall I attribute them to chance, to the influence of humans, or to the interventions of God? Who knows how many influences I have been unaware of for there are things seen and things unseen at work?

Many things beyond our comprehension are at work. I can prove this computer is in front of me by physical senses. I can manipulate some of its functions. I cannot see how it reaches you and influences you either positively or negatively. I cannot comprehend how memories and thoughts stored in my brain for decades can be transferred into and stored in your brain or cause reactions in your life by use of this computer. If we grope with insights of the physical world, how much more difficulty we must expect in dealing with the mental and spiritual components of our being – a “parallel universe,” as some have described it.

Rather than having reached ultimate conclusions, I am still reaching in an infantile manner. The infant does not even wonder about his crib but he begins to be aware of, and reach for, the colorful mobile of butterfly images his mother has hung above him out of his reach. Extending beyond his instinctive motivations, he is beginning his learning process which is never brought to a final conclusion. I am still looking upward and reaching to touch what is beyond my limitations. Does the Intelligence that programmed a chicken to swallow a few pebbles also work in my life?

The Scriptures take God for granted without answering all the questions about his infinite existence before now or afterward. Thinking persons of all generations have pondered his nature. Paul explains, “*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his **invisible***

nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:19-20). Infinite power/energy is the nature and character of God.

We would not generally think that Einstein and other physicists were searching for God but maybe they have come closer than many theologians. Physicists have concluded that energy can become mass and mass can become energy – that mass and energy can alternate. These changes produce heat making a fiery universe. If electrical impulses can make us humans conscious, storing facts and controlling a body composed of physical elements, may these things be infinitely true in the Almighty Power? It is not a matter of which came first for the energy, mass, and electromagnetism are integrated. The universe itself has been a holistic revelation of God to all who have lived.

Our evident source of power on earth is the sun; so it is only to be expected that tribes and races have worshipped that part of the whole as the power and deity. "Sunday" has even crept into the Christian religion. Among those pagans at Athens who were seeking and feeling after God like groping blind men, Paul quoted their more enlightened ones who had proposed, "*In him we live and move and have our being*" (Epimenides) and, "*For we are indeed his offspring*" (Aratus) (Acts 17:26-28). Even not-so-pagan pagans had ventured that every person is in the image of, and has a relationship with, the **eternal power and deity**.

You may rightly laugh at my infantile babblings. If you have a better understanding of God's nature, go with it. What does my probing about God have to do with grit in my gizzard? Much in every way. Each of us is a sort of speck in the universe with the nature of the whole – energy/mass with the invisible creative nature also. How can we determine what portions of the grit and menu are the workings of physics and what are unique interventions we call *miracles* initiated by intelligent design? We cannot. We might affirm that this intelligent power is aware of every atom in the universe and maneuvers them in answer to prayers and for providential protection, yet we cannot prove it. I have seen and experienced many things I cannot explain but I have never seen an action which I can say with certainty was a miracle, an intervention changing the physical laws of the universe. I credit God with the good things of my life through faith rather than through demonstration discernable through the physical senses. Faith is more than subjectivity, imagination, or wishful thinking; it is conviction based on evidence that falls short of proof.

Matter can neither be created nor destroyed even though it can be changed from one form to another. For instance, in burning combustible material, the original atoms are not changed but they reassemble in new combinations. The elements of the universe are composed of protons and neutrons -- positives and negatives. The Almighty Power also must deal with negative power. That power is called the *adversary*, the Hebrew word being *satan*. That negativity has been personified. Our translators have capitalized that word as though it were a created personage – *Satan* -- who would necessarily have been created by God. We, being made of these positive and negative forces incorporated with a measure of the energy, power, and consciousness of God, must deal with this constant positive-negative struggle. They are the gizzard stones and menu that work within us according to the laws of physics except for the special intervention of God. So everything that comes into our individual lives is not sent as a specific intervention by God, nor are we controlled only by cause-effect determinism.

In his omniscience God knows, not just every hair on your head, but also each atom in each hair, and he allows the same things to work in the lives of all, letting the rain fall on the just and the unjust, allowing the rules of the universe to apply to all.

Yes, there is such a thing as chance, a random coincidence. From my teen years I have been impressed with Solomon's observations: "*The race is not to the swift or the*

battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all” (Ecc. 9:11 NIV).

In working his over-all plan to bring salvation to Jew and Gentile in one body, God over-ruled even the rebellion of his people to work for good to accomplish it. In this setting Paul assured, “*We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).*

Based on Paul’s words, my mother often stated “Everything happens for the best,” and we hear many today saying, “God is in charge and will work out everything for the best in the end,” but Paul was not saying that. Did God work for the good of those he destroyed in the flood or the nations Israel destroyed in Canaan? Did everything work for the best for all who have resisted him? His gizzard stones had been grinding through the centuries and reached his redemptive goal in spite of lapses and rebellions in Israel and grievous conduct of individual pagans. Rather than saying everything works for the best, Jesus urged, “*Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matt. 7:13-14).* God works for the good with the few who love him and answer his call.

What of the future? In the cotton patch I could have had no clue as to what changes I would live to see. How could I now be so enlightened as to predict what will happen in this century – much less the next ten or forty thousand or million years? I might hope that mankind will learn to live in peace and unselfish cooperation but I have no basis to claim that the nature of man will change to accomplish that. I might as rightly predict that mankind will obliterate all life from the earth by use of radioactive weapons.

I might predict that our country will be a model for freedom for centuries to come; yet I might foresee our freedom becoming licentious anarchy to be followed by totalitarian dictators during the lifetime of our children or grandchildren.

I might envision the resources of earth being used to provide each family on earth a comfortable dwelling. Or I might expect the continued use of those resources in warring against each other. I might foresee rioting mobs destroying the homes of the wealthier world-wide out of hatred and jealousy.

It seems that all generations have felt that the end of the world was imminent. Misapplications of Biblical texts have been made to teach that this universe will be destroyed and time will end. Recently someone pointed me to a list of over two hundred dates in history in which zealots claimed Jesus would return and bring universal destruction. There has been a money-making revival of such disappointing teachings in our generation. They tend to draw more ridicule than trust from the secular society.

The **invisible nature** of the Almighty is **eternal power**, the source of all energy. His energy has been transferred into the mass of the universe whose elements cannot be destroyed. To claim that God will destroy this universe would call for his self destruction. It is extremely simplistic to demand that the eternal power, the very nature of God, became active only about six thousand years ago and that it may be obliterated at any moment.

The Bible deals with redemptive history, not the history of the universe except incidentally. The *last days* were the final days of God’s dealing through fleshly Israel. The *end of the world/age* was the finality of his covenant of law with Israel. Redemptive history was completed-made perfect with the full inauguration of his spiritual reign. The use of physical symbols to predict this procedure must not be interpreted as history of the physical universe and evidence that he will destroy his own power – his eternal nature.

Yes, I am still reaching upward toward the butterflies. If it proves that there are none there – that there is no Intelligent Designer – none of us will ever know it! All is meaningless and futile. I have many skeptical questions, but if I have only a thread of

faith compared to a cable of doubt, I will follow the faith for only it can give any meaning to life or hope for endless relationship with the Eternal Power of the universe. A trickling spring of hope offers more satisfaction than an ocean of doubt.

Without this conclusion all the grit in my gizzard would be for nothing.

Paul's concluding exclamation after reviewing God's workings have long been a favorite quotation of mine: "*O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.*" (Romans 11:33-36).

And I will add my much-used tag line: "*I believe; help my unbelief!*" (Mark 9:24). []