

Responses To My “9-11” Article

An unusual number of you responded to my “ramblings” of the last mailout relating to 9-11-01.. Most of your notes were gracious expressions of confirmation along with some additional observations of your own. In further ramblings, at this time I will copy lines from some of them and make reference to others while adding comments of my own.

“If what you just shared are “ramblings,” then what is wrong with me? They made perfect sense when I read them!”

“I must respond to your great words of wisdom! ‘Another Day of Infamy’ is, without a doubt, the wisest and most appropriate writing I have read concerning the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Once again, you have shared with us the wisdom of your experiences and in doing so you have blessed us greatly,” thus Roy, a fellow-Texan in Odessa wrote so generously.

Jim from Minnesota observes: “I found this issue to be a very cogent rendition of world history that helps crystallize for me how we came to be evangelized with the ‘sword of the Spirit’ (i.e. the word of God) instead of at the point of a Muslim sword. We were never taught the victory of Charles Martel was a turning point in Western Civilization. (I studied world history forty years ago, also in Texas! See how quickly humanism crept into our public school education?) In reflecting upon what I’ve just read, I think you correctly point to an historical truth.”

Then Jim makes this incisive point: “I think another good example of how we in the household of faith denounce terrorist actions done in the name of Christ are the fire-bombings of aboritoriums and the misdirected murders of abortionists. Both go a long way toward giving our secular culture the ammo they need to paint all evangelicals as cultists or Christian fundamentalist extremists. We should be exhorting one another to employ prayer, effectual fervent prayer, when we confront our societal sins; not acts of terrorism in the name of Jesus!”

Various correspondents feel an extreme guilt for our nation for the willful destruction of so many lives by abortion. The many prayers and songs sung since the tragedy imploring God go bless America are thought to be vain by these readers because they are mouthed by unashamed offenders of God’s standards of morality. They warn that God will not bless America in an unregenerate state. They call for national confession of forsaking God and for repentance from individual practices of moral degeneracy.

Let me inject a comment here. We are aghast that a religion like that of the Talibans, which claims to promote love and peace, can justify such murderous violence toward others who disagree. As believers, we may not employ such physically destructive violence against other believers who disagree with us, but who can deny that spiritual destruction has laid waste the unity and love of God’s people and destroyed souls in the process. Contentions bred such animosities in

the churches of Galatia that Paul scolded, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another" (Gal. 5:15-16). Because he disagrees with me, a brother who has given his life in serving the same God in the same church with me, wrote this month accusing me of sowing discord among brothers. "Be careful, lest you seek to be the big fish in the little pond," he warns in implying that I have evil motives. "It might be that you need the money you make off the sales of your books that prompts you to keep bad mouthing the church and expose what you classify as being wrong with it." This brother's judgments are mild in comparison to those sometimes heard from dissenters who, like the terrorists, destroy themselves in the process of destroying other disciples. The most vicious biting and devouring that I have known has come from fellow-preachers. They are just "contending for the faith in love" with vicious animosity! "Oh, to see ourselves as others see us!" And as God sees us!

Well, I chased a rabbit there. Some of our readers put things in a more practical, positive assessment. One wrote, "You do reflect the conflicts of thoughts and feelings of so many of us. We must continue to believe -- God is good, God is forever, God is the father, God is God. We must wait on God!" Texan to Texan, he concludes, "I, like you, am doubly blessed being an American and a Texan."

Tragedy refocuses some persons on the precious things of life, like the expressing of love. From Georgia, Sue touched our hearts with "just wanted to say how much I love and appreciate all the work you two are doing and have been doing for so many years. It is a sad time for our country, and somehow, saying 'I love and appreciate you' has become more important to me. Thank you for your essays and what you give of yourselves to others. Though I have never met you, I feel that I know you and I wish that I was able to sit down and visit with you." We feel the warmth of your love, Sue.

We are reminded of our calling to work for peace and unity to bridge the gap between peoples by Terry in Texas: "I want to thank you for your expressions of reason and emotion at this hard time. Last night the Kirkpatrick and I were discussing the need for peace and unity to be expressed between the gulf of religious divisions that all claim to honor the same God. These are hard times indeed, and we have to trust all the more that He is in charge." Right! "A better world begins with me!"

My car radio is set on a conservative station carrying various religious programs and call-in talk shows. I fear that a steady diet of listening to that sort of programming would help a person neither spiritually, emotionally, socially, nor politically. I know I will lose some of you here, for it is evident that many feed on their messages of distrust, suspicion, conspiracy, gloom and doom, and arm-chair quarterbacking in general.

Has God blessed our country in times past? We will agree that we have been most blessed, and we implore him to continue. Were our people more moral and God-fearing in the past? I doubt it. A greater percentage of the population

attends churches today than in colonial times. They drank more hard liquor then than we do now. George Washington supplied plenty of liquor on election day! Jefferson and other leaders were deists. Although he believed in a creator, Franklin was no saint. While he represented our nation in France as an ambassador, he lived with a mistress. I do not have a researched comparison of moral standards then and now as some have made to display here, but that is not needful.

It has been common for people of power and wealth throughout the ages to live above law and restraint, oppress the common man, and conceal their base and conspiratorial activities from the public. In our land of freedom of speech and the press, we learn more about the unsavory activities of others than in previous times. In many countries today there is still control of information. In saying this, however, we are not justifying the flaunting of all sorts of sinful practices so common in our nation at present.

When were those “good old days”? When was our nation God-fearing and upright? There has been no such time! Long, long ago, Solomon gave good advice: “Say not, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this” (Eccles. 7:10). There is a tendency for men to think that the time in which they live is the worst of times and that doom is just ahead. Please read again Freedom’s Ring, Number 35, “Terrible Times In The Last Days” to renew your perspective.

The pertinent question is: Does God bless or refuse to bless a nation according to its morality and spirituality? Does he send the sunshine and rain only on, or more abundantly on, approved nations? Does he allow catastrophic disasters to happen only to corrupt and/or pagan nations? Or individuals? Be careful about your answer!

You may be eager to remind me that the Old Testament scriptures are replete with instances of God blessing Israel when they did his will and sending tragic discipline when they strayed from him. Correct. But Israel was a chosen nation, formed and nurtured in monotheism by God, through whom he was to bring the Savior. God has no chosen nation today (not even our beloved USA), now that Jesus has come to reign over God’s spiritual people from all nations. Finally, in rejection of the rebellious nation of Israel, he destroyed it in A.D. 70. A prudent teacher of the word will not take texts stating God’s promises to bless Israel in OT times and apply them to nations today.

From somewhere in cyberspace Jim wrote: “You ask if those people were more evil. I say no. But God is sovereign and His judgment is just. Remember Christ’s questions in Luke 13? ‘Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed

them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Jim continues: “We always ask ‘Why?’ but that is only half the question. The real question is ‘Why not?’ There is none righteous. There is no one who deserves to draw another breath. Even those who have found salvation in Christ are in no position to argue against God’s justice in the consequences suffered in this life. This country has largely turned its back on God. Scripture and history demonstrate that God will not forever let such abuses stand. He used nations more evil than Israel to carry out His judgment on her. We should not be surprised at what has happened.”

From quite a different perspective David insists: “As a veteran of Korea and Vietnam and a reader of the Bible, I, for one, do not believe that God makes us war or is involved in our wars. I believe that mankind is just mean enough to do this themselves. If not, then there is the devil. We have free will to be pleasing or displeasing to ourselves and God. It is not responsible to blame God for our human failings.”

In our more sober moments, we will all agree that it is improper to attribute the works of evil forces to God. At best, we can conclude that God permits evil and has at times let that evil be perpetrated against others as a disciplinary measure.

In a longer lesson we would review promises made to individual believers. For the present we will quote again from Solomon indicating that God generally leaves things to their natural course: “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all” (Eccles. 9:11). Does our piety give us license to replace that last clause with something like “but God chooses and directs each thing that happens to them all”? God’s role in human suffering has been pondered by the devout of antiquity. In poetic and allegoric style of drama, an ancient unnamed writer probed this matter in the Book of Job. You will find it much more interesting if you read it in a modern translation.

Only the narrowed dogmatist claims to have all the answers to these age-old questions, yet we can still have faith even though the answers are not all clear.

(Cecil Hook; September 2001) []