

## TALKING BACK TO GOD by Jack Thompson

I call your attention to a statement made by the apostle Paul in Romans 9:20, "*Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?*" Here Paul strongly reproves the impiety and wickedness of questioning God's wisdom and righteousness. Such shows a lack of reverence and respect for God. Such really charges God with unfairness. Who is man that he should find fault with God? Who is man that he should talk back at God?

Parents dislike the idea of their children talking back to them. We even punish them when they chide or dispute with us. And yet, many people today who pose as God's children will chatter and chide God by holding to theories which are contrary to His Holy Word. To them Paul would say, "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Who is mortal man that he should reply to the Infinite God? Man is a mere human creature who knows comparatively nothing as compared to God's wisdom. Why, then, should he question God's justice and God's ways. Such is presumptuous.

When God speaks in declaring His righteous will, man should be silent before Him. Isaiah the prophet said, "*Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken*" (Isaiah 1:2). We should adopt the attitude of the prophet in all that God has said to us today in His holy Word. We should say with the prophet Habakkuk, "*But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him*" (Habakkuk 2:20).

To the Hebrew Christians, Paul said, "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son*" (Hebrews 1:1-2). From this passage we learn two things: First, that God "spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." Second, that God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." In the first two dispensations, the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages, God spoke to His people by His holy messengers. For the first 2500 years of the world's history, during the Patriarchal Age, God spoke through Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Joseph and others. For the next 1500 years of the world's history, during the Mosaic Age, God spoke to His chosen people, the Israelites, through Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and many others. But in the Christian Age, that under which we live, beginning at the first Pentecost following Christ's resurrection and continuing until the end of the world, God has spoken and continues to speak to us through His Son.

Thus we conclude that in every age God has spoken to man. The very fact that God has spoken to man makes man solemnly accountable. God has spoken to man because "*the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*" (Jeremiah 10:23). Also, God has spoken to man because "*the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men*" (1 Corinthians 1:25). Therefore, why should man dispute with God? When the Lord has spoken, that should be an end of all controversy. Man should be silent before Him and not protest, regardless of what God has said. Hence we should say with Paul, "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor?*" (Romans 11:33-34).

There have been those who have felt their own Sufficiency and no need of God. Nebuchadnezzar felt mighty important when he looked over his kingdom, and he swelled with pride as he surveyed the works of his own hands. Listen to his own words of self-praise, *"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"* (Daniel 4:30). But God pulled him from his throne and gave him the heart of a beast, and after this haughty king walked on his all-fours for awhile, ate grass as an ox, with his hair grown like eagle's feathers, his body bathed with the dew of heaven, and his nails as bird's claws, he accumulated a great respect for God. Hear him in his moments of deep humility, *"And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?....Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase"* (Daniel 4:34-35, 47).

There have been those in every age who would attempt to talk back at God. Cain attempted to offer sacrifice to God by substitution. Paul said, *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain"* (Hebrews 11:4). In view of the fact that *faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17); it therefore follows that the word of God demanded the kind of sacrifice which Abel offered. We read these words in the Old Testament account of Cain and Abel, *"And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect"* (Genesis 4:3-5). It is not hard for us to understand why Abel's offering pleased the Lord and Cain's did not. Abel's pleased God because it was according to His will and Cain's was not. God commanded the kind of offering that Abel made, but Cain's offering was a substitution for what God had commanded. Hence Cain's sin was the sin of presumption--the sin of talking back at God--that of saying that something else will do as well as for what God had said. In the offering of Abel's lamb there was blood, hence it pointed toward the sacrifice of the Messiah. But in the offering of Cain's fruit of the ground there was no blood.

Aaron attempted to worship a golden calf. God had given to him and his brother a law which said, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not made unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth"* (Exodus 20:2-3) But after making the golden calf, he then said to the Israelites, *"These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt"* (Exodus 32:4). This was outright presumption on the part of Aaron. Even though God had spoken His will to Aaron and Moses, yet Aaron disputed and chided with God in disobedience.

Not all of those who have talked back at God are in the past. Not all of such people are dead; many of them are still living. There is a refined form of blasphemy or pious profanity today that is nothing short of arraignment with God. For an example of such, some are saying that, "One

church is as good an another." But what does the Lord say about the matter? The New Testament teaches that there is just one church. Jesus said, *"Upon this rock I will build MY CHURCH" (Matthew 16:18)*; not "my churches." Luke said of the Jerusalem church, *"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47)*; not "the churches."

When the New Testament speaks of the church under a figure, without a single exception, it uses only figures of speech that will admit there is but one church. For instance, the church is presented in the New Testament under the figure of a body. But Paul said, *"There is one body" (Ephesians 4:4)*, and Paul further declares that Christ *"is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18)*. Thus when one contends for a multiplicity of churches he is merely saying, "God you don't know what you are talking about when you say "There is one body," for we have over 400 bodies or churches here in America alone."

Another bit of pious profanity is that, "One can be saved outside the church as well as in it." Such an expression is equal to saying that one can be saved without the blood of Christ, for it was Christ's blood that was paid to purchase the church. Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to *"feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28)*. Hence, if one can be saved outside the church, then Jesus shed His blood in vain, and Calvary was nothing short of being just another murder. Therefore, when men contend that one can be saved outside the church of our Lord as well as in it, they are saying, "God, You must be mistaken about it, for we know those who are going to be saved who are not in anybody's church." But "who are thou that repliest against God?"

Another expression of disputing with God is, "Any name in religion is all right, for there is nothing in a name." But, Solomon said, *"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches" (Proverbs 22:1)*. In the New Testament we find such names for the church as *"the church of the Lord," (Acts 20:28)*; *"the church of God," (1 Corinthians 1:2)*; *"the body of Christ," (1 Corinthians 12:27)*. It is "the church of the Lord" because Jesus owns it, and it "the church of God" because God planned it (Ephesians 3:10-11). In the New Testament we find such divine names for the members of the church as, *"Christians," (Acts 11:26)*; *"saints," (Ephesians 1:1)*; *"children of God," (Galatians 3:26)*; *"disciples," (Acts 11:26)*; and *"brethren in Christ," (Colossians 1:2)*. The church should be called after the name of Christ because it truly belongs to Him, and those in the church should be called after the name of Christ because they are truly His disciples. Hence Peter said, *"But if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name" (1 Peter 4:16)*.

Denominational names glorify some religious reformer, ordinance or system. Thus, when men become dissatisfied with the name God gave and wear names of human origin that is simply disputing with God.

Another expression you hear often today, which is but an insult to God is this, "We are broadminded; we allow a candidate to be baptized any way he chooses." But man has but one choice in obedience to God--simply to obey God or disobey Him. When Jesus was baptized He *"went up straightway out of the water" (Matthew 3:16)*. When Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch, *"they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him" (Acts 8:38)*. Paul said, *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as*

*Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). And again, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him..." (Colossians 2:12). Paul concludes the matter by declaring that there is "one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). We have no trouble in reaching an unbiased decision that the "one baptism" is immersion in water, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19), which is "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Hence when men contend that sprinkling or pouring water over a candidate is just acceptable as immersion in water, they are calling God in question.*

Do not be such an egotist as to talk back to God. You and I are mere mortal creatures--we are the creation of God; it should, then, behoove us to assume the attitude of David when he said, *"Speak; for thy servant heareth" (1 Samuel 3:10).*

Great pressure is sometimes brought to bear upon the plain churches of Christ as to why we do not teach and practice certain things. But we exclude the innovations and doctrines of men from our worship and preaching, because they are without divine origin. They represent humanism in religion. Unless a thing is found in the New Testament, either by command, inference or principle, we cannot practice it. This is not egotism--it is conviction. We are not seeking to reform the religious world. That has been tried time and again during the Reformation, without success. We are seeking to restore, to the extent of our humble ability, the church of our Lord, as it was in the beginning, in doctrine, organization, work, worship and practice.