

ARE YOU CRITICIZING GOD?

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O man, who art thou that repliest against God? — Romans 9:20.

THESE WORDS ought to awaken anyone who is not utterly beyond hope. Notice the first two words and the last word. "O man" and "God." "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Here God and man are put in sharpest contrast, God in His infinite greatness and wisdom and man in his infinitesimal smallness and ignorance. And in the Greek there is also a strong emphasis on the "thou." "O MAN, who art thou that repliest against GOD?" It will be a happy day for some of us if God will brand that text upon our memories so that we shall never be able to forget it nor get away from it. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

The most insanely daring thing that any man can do, the most exceedingly foolish thing any man can do, the most desperately wicked thing that any man can do, is to reply against God, to enter into controversy with God, to criticize God, to condemn God. Yet that is what many people are doing

When you hear a little child replying against his father or mother, getting into controversy, criticizing, condemning, you are filled with disgust and indignation. It is something not to be tolerated for one moment. But what is it for any mere human being, any mere creature of the dust such as all of us are, to reply against, to criticize, to enter into controversy with, to try to prove wrong the Infinite and Eternal God? It is the most exceedingly foolish and desperately wicked thing a human being can do.

1. The Folly and Wickedness of Entering into Controversy with God

There are four facts which show the exceeding folly and desperate wickedness of replying against God, of entering into controversy with God, of criticizing or condemning God.

The first is the fact of the infinite majesty of God. Our text itself contrasts the infinite majesty of God with the infinitesimal smallness of man. It reads, "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Yes, who art thou, anyway? And who is God?

You are one out of 2,000,000,000 like yourself now inhabiting this globe. And what is this globe on which you and I live? The earth is so small a part of the already known universe that if the sun were hollow, you could pour into it 1,200,000 earths like ours and still there would be room enough left for them to rattle around in it. Yes, the sun itself is very, very small in comparison with Arcturus and some of the other stars whose diameters have been recently

measured, and there are now known to be more than 225,000,000 of these great worlds we call stars in this universe of ours. God, with whom you are seeking to enter into controversy, seeking to criticize and condemn, made them all. "He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

We men in this day of increasingly successful investigation of the incredible, and, as it seems to us, practically infinite, magnitude of the stellar heavens are sometimes tempted to be puffed up because a few great leaders and investigators among us are beginning to know a little about these vast stellar worlds and interstellar spaces. But what about the God who planned them all and made them all? Our increasing discoveries of the vastness of the physical universe ought to fill us with an increasing sense of our own nothingness in comparison with the infinite greatness and majesty of Him who planned and made them all. But, alas, oftentimes it seems only to puff us up with pride that we are so wise as to understand a small part of the ways and power of yon infinite God.

The second fact that shows us the exceeding folly and desperate wickedness of replying against God, of entering into controversy with God, of criticizing God, of condemning God, is the fact of the infinite and absolute holiness of God. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). God is the One, as I read in the Scripture lesson tonight, in whose presence the seraphim themselves, the "burning ones" (for that is what the Hebrew word "seraphim" means), burning in their own intense holiness, must veil their faces and feet in that infinitely holy Presence and keep continually crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty" (Isaiah 6:3). God is the One in whose presence Isaiah, that holy man of old, covered his face and cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts." God is the One in whose presence Job, the "perfect man," Job, who had stoutly maintained his integrity before all the persistent and united accusations of his friends, when he got one glimpse of God face to face, overwhelmed with the sense of his own nothingness and vileness in comparison with the infinitely holy One, cried, "I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). Such is God. And "who art thou that repliest against God?" And what art thou?

What are we all, the very best of us? Vile-the best of us is but a loathsome sinner. We may not yet realize the fact, but it is true. Our lives have been shot through and through by sin. Yet you undertake to stand in the presence of this Holy God, in whose presence the seraphim veil their faces and their feet, and reply against Him, to suggest what God ought to do, to enter into controversy with God, to criticize God for things which He has seen fit to do, to murmur against God.

There is a third fact that shows us the exceeding folly and desperate wickedness of replying against God, of entering into controversy with God, of criticizing God, of condemning God, and that is the fact of God's infinite wisdom. God is not only

a Being of infinite majesty and holiness. He is also a Being of infinite wisdom. We look up at the starry heavens above our heads, we look at these wonderful worlds of light that stud the heavens by night. We think of the overwhelming things about their immensity and the incredible speed and momentum of their movements as they rush through space, and as we look up at them, if we are wise, we say, "Oh, God, what a Being of infinite wisdom as well as majesty Thou art that Thou canst guide these inconceivably enormous worlds as they go whirling through space with such incredible velocity and momentum."

And yet many of you here tonight do not hesitate to look up at that Infinitely wise God who made these wonderful spheres of light, who guides the whole universe in its wonderful, stupendous and bewildering course, and attempt to tell Him what you think He ought to do! Thou fool, art thou mad? No inmate of Patten ever did an insaner thing. "Who art thou?" The wisest man on earth is but a child; the wisest philosopher does not know much; the greatest man of science knows but very little. What he knows is almost nothing in comparison with what he does not know. What he does know, even about the material universe, is as nothing compared with what he does not know.

How much does the wisest scientist know even about this small planet? What does he really know, for example, about earthquakes? Have you ever stopped to think of the fact that the most confidently believed science of one hundred years ago is regarded by all modern scientists as foolishness? If we are to judge the future by the past, the most confidently believed science of today will be regarded as foolishness by the scientists of one hundred years hence.

When I was giving special attention to scientific study not so very many years ago, the nebular hypothesis was almost universally accepted. But some of the most advanced and reliable scientists of today are not only questioning it, but declare, at least in private, that it is exploded. What the scientists of a hundred years ago taught as being settled forever is known by our little children in the primary schools today as completely disproven. What the best scientist of today thinks he knows to be true a little child in primary school one hundred years hence will know to be false. The best scientific knowledge of today will be regarded as foolishness a hundred years from now, and the best scientific knowledge of one hundred years from now will be foolishness to the Infinitely wise God.

Suppose some child of thirteen or fourteen should take a book on philosophy setting forth the ripest product of the best philosophic thought of today and begin to criticize it, page by page. What would you think? Would you stand and look at the boy and say with unbounded admiration, "What a bright lad he is?" No, you would say, "What a conceited idiot he is to undertake, at his age and with his limited knowledge, to criticize the best philosophic thought of the day!" But he would not be so conceited an idiot as you or I would be were we to attempt to

criticize an infinitely wise God for we are far less than children compared with the infinite God.

The most profound philosopher of today is but a little child compared with the Infinite God. And yet you, who do not make any pretensions of being a philosopher at all, take God's Book, you a little child, an infant, take this Book which represents the best wisdom of God, and you sit down and turn it, page by page, and try to criticize it, and people stand and look at you and admire and say, "What a scholar!" But the angels look down and say, "What a fool!" And what does God say? "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord [the Almighty and the Eternal] shall have [you] in derision" (Ps. 2:4).

There is a fourth fact that emphasizes the extreme folly and desperate wickedness of replying against God, of entering into controversy with God, of criticizing God, or condemning God, and that fact is that He is not only a Being of Infinite majesty, holiness, and wisdom, but also a Being of infinite goodness and love. Why, man, you owe everything you have in the world to God. You owe your very existence to Him. You owe to Him your power to see, your power to hear, your power to taste. You owe to Him your power to breathe, to live, to walk, to work, your power to enjoy this wonderful world which He has made, in which He permits and enables us to live. 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning' (James 1:17). The poorest of us, the most unfortunate of us, has an immense deal for which to be thankful. You who seem to have very little have exceedingly much in comparison with nothing. Are you blind? Well, you can hear and taste, can you not? Are you deaf, dumb, and blind? Well, you can eat and enjoy your food, can you not? The man who has all five senses would be just as reasonable if he were to complain because he has not six as the man who has four senses would be to complain because he has not five. Thank God for what you have, rather than complain against God for what you have not.

Suppose I should have found on Thanksgiving Day a poor, half-starved tramp and had taken him to my home, given him a good, well-cooked dinner of roast lamb, white potatoes, other vegetables, and pumpkin pie, and then he had gone and complained against me to some other tramp because I did not give him turkey and sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, mince pie, and plum pudding. Would he not have been an ungrateful cur? Yet not so, ungrateful as you are when you complain at the God who has given you taste, hearing, touch, feeling, and many other blessings, because He has not given you sight also. The poorest of us, the most suffering of us, have an enormous deal for which to be thankful and all of it came from God. Not only that, but you and I not only have these things that we possess to be thankful for but, furthermore, every man of us has trampled God's law under foot; every one of us has been a sinner justly condemned before God. But God, instead of dealing with us in stem wrath and judgment, as we all deserve, has not only given us all these blessings, but, in addition, has given His own Son to die on

the Cross of Calvary in our place. He has given His best beloved, His dearest, His only begotten Son. But in spite of all that wondrous love that did not stop even at the sacrifice of His own Son, some of you presume to criticize God, who gave His Son to die for you. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

One of the greatest Italian statesmen of the last century, the greatest of his day but one, was devoutly loved in his youth by a young woman. When he entered the army of Garibaldi, this woman who loved him enlisted too, and fought in the war by the side of her lover, just to be near him. And one day he was shot and fell on the field of battle, and that woman who loved him rushed out beneath a rain of bullets, lifted her fallen lover from the ground; and, amidst a terrific storm of bullets, carried her lover to safety. Then she watched over him for days and weeks until she had nursed him back to health. Suppose he had deserted her then, what would the whole world have called him? In point of fact he married her, but afterward he divorced her; though he was one of the ablest statesmen of the century, Italy and all Europe, for all his brilliant gifts, never forgave him his treatment of the devoted woman who had risked her life to save his.

But what has God done for you? The eternal God has consented that His heart should be torn and crushed to save you and me. Yet some of us dare to enter into controversy with this God of infinite love, to criticize that eternal God who consented that His heart be torn and bruised and crushed to save us. Oh, the desperate wickedness, the amazing folly of replying against a God of infinite majesty, infinite holiness, infinite wisdom, and, above all, of infinite love. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

2. **Who Repliest Against God?**

But who is replying against God? Who is entering into controversy with God? Who is criticizing or condemning God? Five classes are replying against God.

First of all, the men and women who complain of God's providential dealings with them are replying against God, are entering into controversy with God, are criticizing God and condemning God. Many a man or woman has said to me, "I think God is cruel." "Why do you think He is cruel?" One replies, "He has taken away my husband." Another, "He has taken away my wife." Another, "He has taken away my child. He has taken away the light of our home." Another, "He has brought me down from financial prosperity to financial failure. I once stood high in the business world. I now have to almost beg my bread, and I say God is cruel." Another says, "If God is good, why did He permit this awful disaster or that which laid waste a beautiful city or nation? I think God is cruel."

You do? You do? You think God is cruel! Who is God? A Being of infinite majesty, a Being of infinite holiness, a Being of infinite wisdom, a Being of infinite love, a Being who gave His own Son to die that you might be saved! "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

But you say, "I do not understand it." Why should you understand it? Who are you? If you were really wise, you would not ask to understand it. If you had really good sense, you would not feel any need of having it explained. You would say, "I know God is infinitely good and infinitely wise. I know He is infinitely loving, too. I know He gave His Son to die for me, and though I cannot understand it, nevertheless it comes from God's hand and I know it is all right. "Naked came I [into this world]: ... the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). I do not ask to understand; I am perfectly content to trust in the dark that God who is so infinitely worthy of my trust.

I had two friends in England, very dear friends, who were beautiful Christians. They had a lovely daughter. She grew to maidenhood and was said to have been an unusually beautiful girl in both face and character. Some said she was the most beautiful character they had ever met. When this lovely daughter was seventeen or eighteen, she was taken with rheumatic fever, and, after awful suffering, died. The father and mother never complained. They kissed the hand that smote.

Some time after this sorrow had befallen them, I was talking with them about it. They told me how God had sustained them in that trying hour. Only a little while after this conversation, their second daughter, now grown to womanhood, was also taken down with precisely the same malady, rheumatic fever. Her fever ran up to 107 and stayed there day after day, and she seemed beyond all hope. Then the mother's faith gave way, and she said, "God is cruel to take my second daughter when I never complained about the first, and not only to take my second daughter, but to take her in just the same way He took the first." But God spared the child. She is well now, a devoted Christian woman in very active Christian work. And that mother has repented of her wickedness.

Oh, friends, it was wicked, very wicked. Our hearts were almost broken in sympathy during the days that child hung between life and death. Telegrams kept coming to me telling of her condition, and my heart bled for my friends. But, nonetheless, I say that was wicked on the mother's part to say "God is cruel." That was exceedingly wicked, that was desperately wicked, to call God cruel. That same mother lost all three of her sons and her husband in the late war, but she has never again whispered that God is cruel. I had a letter from her only the other day that was full of trust and hope.

Some of you are passing through trials which, if the rest of us knew, would fill our hearts with sympathy and pain. But you are murmuring against God, and that is wicked, that is exceedingly foolish, that is desperately wicked; for "O man, who art thou that repliest against God," against a God of infinite majesty, against a God of infinite wisdom, against a God of infinite holiness, against a God of infinite love, against a God who gave His only begotten Son to die for you? But you say, "I do not understand it." Why should you understand it? Why should you ask to understand it? Who are you that God should explain it to you? Oh, that we

might always bear in mind who God is, and who we are; what God is, and what we are.

Then there is a second class who are replying against God, who are entering into controversy with God, who are criticizing and condemning God, namely, those who are criticizing this Book and trying to pull this Book to pieces. This Book is God's Word. That is thoroughly established. When you criticize this Book, you criticize its Author, who is God. When you criticize this Book, you criticize God. But you say, "I do not believe it is God's Word." That does not alter the fact, not in the least. It is His Word—there is abundant proof that it is His Word. I have proved over and over again in this place that this Book is the Word of God. This Book is God's Word, and whoever ventures to criticize it ventures to criticize God. Never forget that. I repeat it, whoever ventures to criticize this Book ventures to criticize God, and the one who criticizes God is guilty of exceeding folly and desperate wickedness. You say, "I do not like that." I am sorry that you do not, for it is true, and I always feel profoundly sorry for the man or woman who does not like the truth. They are in a bad way.

One night one of my workers in Minneapolis called me down to speak to a man who said that he was an infidel. "Why are you an infidel?" I asked. "Because I do not believe the Bible," he replied. "Yes, but why do you not believe the Bible?" "It is full of contradictions," he answered. "Show me one," I quietly said, and handed him my Bible to find it. He said, "It is full of them." "Well," I said, "if it is full of them, you ought to be able to show me at least one." "I don't pretend to know as much about the Bible as you do," he blurted out. I said, "Then what are you talking about it for?" I turned him to our Bible text of tonight, "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Then I turned him to Matthew 12:36, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Then I said, "The Bible is God's Word, and you have said it is full of contradictions, and in saying that you have condemned the Author, you have condemned God, and Jesus said, Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." You have criticized God, and you will have to give account of it in the day of judgment, of all these words, these idle words that you have just used." He turned pale, and said, "I did not mean to do that." "But that is what you have done." And it is what some of you have done in the last twenty-four hours. You have ventured to laugh at something in the Bible. When you did that, you laughed at God. You ventured to set up some opinion of yours against what God says in His Book. You ventured to enter into controversy with God, you ventured to criticize something in the Bible, and when you did that, you criticized the Author of the Bible, you criticized God. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

There is a third class who are replying against God, who are entering into controversy with God, who are criticizing God, who are condemning God, and that is those who make light of the Bible doctrine of salvation by atoning blood, the Bible doctrine that we are saved through the shedding of the blood of Jesus on

the Cross of Calvary. That doctrine so frequently and so unmistakably taught in God's Word is ridiculed today in many a so-called Christian pulpit. Any pulpit that ridicules the doctrine of salvation by atoning blood is not a Christian pulpit. A very noted preacher in New York City, whose books have a wide sale, was reported to me by one who took down his words in his classroom to have said, "The doctrine of blood atonement is nauseating to me." Any preacher who ridicules the doctrine of salvation by atoning blood is not a minister of Jesus Christ, he is a minister of Satan, no matter how genial and amiable a man he may be.

The Bible doctrine of salvation by atoning blood is ridiculed in this day on every hand. Some preachers have said it is foolish for me to preach this "old doctrine." Well, it is an old doctrine, but it is a true doctrine. And I would rather believe and teach the old that is true than the new that is false. I did not invent this doctrine. I do not know enough to invent it. I found it in that Book, and, thank God, I found it to be true in my own life; it saved me and I preach it, and it has saved thousands through my preaching of it. I preach it, but I did not invent it. God is the Author of this doctrine, and when you criticize the preaching of it, you do not criticize me, you criticize God. It would be a matter of no great consequence for you to criticize me or my preaching. Why should you not criticize me? I am not infallible. I cannot see why I am not just as properly an object of criticism as anybody else. It does not harm me, and it gives some people lots of fun. Sometimes it greatly helps me. But, ah, when you criticize this doctrine you are not criticizing me, you are criticizing God, and that is serious, tremendously serious. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

Then there is a fourth class who are replying against God, namely, those who complain of the Bible doctrine of retribution for sin, the Bible doctrine of endless punishment. This is not my doctrine. I did not get it up. Some say that it is a medieval doctrine. No, it is not a medieval doctrine. They did not originate it in the Middle Ages. It is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, taught by Him, not in the Middle Ages but in the first century. Why will people who try to pose as scholars display such ignorance of the meaning of commonly used words?

Jesus Christ says distinctly in Matthew 25:41 that at the judgment of the nations living on the earth when He comes again He will say to those on His left hand, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." And, five verses farther down, He says, "And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Now, I did not invent that. That was in the Bible before I was born. Jesus said it eighteen centuries before I was born. I simply found it in the Bible and preach it because it is there. I received a letter once from a Universalist preacher in New Hampshire, saying, "The doctrine you preach makes God a monster." Whoever says that this doctrine makes God a monster is himself a blasphemer, for it is God's doctrine. When you say that "Whosoever preaches this doctrine makes God a monster," you say that God is a monster. A lady in Liverpool wrote me, "I cannot conceive how a God of

love should leave anybody to everlasting punishment." Why should she conceive how a God of love should leave anybody to everlasting punishment? It seemed to have never entered her head that anything she could not conceive could be easily conceivable by someone who knew more than she did. If she had had even a modicum of commonsense, she would have seen at once that although she, with her very limited intelligence, could not conceive it, an infinitely wise God might have a thousand reasons for doing it, even though she could not see one.

It has never dawned on some people that even God could by any possibility know more than they know. It never dawned on me for years, and in those days I was a Universalist. I thought that all men would ultimately be saved. I was a Universalist because I had an argument for the ultimate salvation of everybody for which I could see no possible answer. I thought if I could not see an answer, why, no one could. So I challenged anybody to meet me on that argument and answer it. I went around with my head pretty high and said, "I have found an unanswerable reason for Universalism." I thought that I was a Universalist for all time and that anyone who was not a Universalist was not well posted.

One day it occurred to me that an infinitely wise God might possibly know more than I did. That had never dawned on me before. It dawned upon me also that it was quite possible that a God of infinite wisdom might have a thousand good reasons for doing a thing, when I, in my finite foolishness, could not see even one. So my fondly cherished Universalism went up in smoke.

If you get that thought, that an Infinitely wise God may possibly know more than even you do, and that God in His infinite wisdom might have a thousand good reasons for doing a thing when you cannot see even one, you will have learned one of the greatest theological truths of the day-one that will solve many of your perplexing problems in the Bible.

Men try to lay hold of infinite wisdom and fancy that they can squeeze it down into the capacity of their pint-cup minds. But because they cannot squeeze infinite wisdom into their pint-cup minds, they say, "I don't believe that Book is the Word of God, because it has something in it that I cannot understand the philosophy of." Why should you understand the philosophy of it? Who are you, anyhow? How much of a mind have you, anyhow? How long have you had it? How long are you going to keep it? Who gave it to you?

It is not our business to find out the philosophy of things; it is not our business to see the reason of things. It is our business to hear what God has to say, and when He says it, believe it, whether you can understand the philosophy of it or not.

When my children were small and ignorant, I told them a lot of things that I could not explain to them because of the limitations of their minds. There are a great many things that even God cannot explain to you or to me because we do not

know enough yet to have it explained to us. God is too wise, I say it reverently, to try to explain some things to a person who does not know more than you do.

There is one more class that is replying against God, that is the men who instead of accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior and surrendering to Him as their Lord and Master and openly confessing Him as such before the world, are making excuses for not doing it. Jesus says in John 6:37, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." God says in Revelation 22:17, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Anybody can come to Christ, and anybody who does come will be received and saved. Yet many of you, instead of coming, are making excuses for not coming. By every excuse you make you are replying against God, you are entering into controversy with God, you are condemning God, who invites you to come. You cannot frame an excuse for not coming and accepting Christ that does not condemn God. Every excuse that any mortal makes for not accepting Christ, in its ultimate analysis, condemns God.

For example, some of you say, "I am too great a sinner to come." But God says in 1 Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." And when you say, "I cannot come because I am too great a sinner," you give the lie to God. He says you can. Another says, "I cannot come because I am too weak to hold out in the Christian life." But God says in Jude 24, "He is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." You say, "God cannot keep me." God says He can. And when you say He cannot, you make God a liar and condemn God. Another says, "I cannot come because I have not the right kind of feeling." But God says, "Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely." God says, "You can come," and you say, "I cannot," and that excuse condemns God. Every conceivable excuse the sinner makes for not coming to Christ at once, in its ultimate analysis, condemns God, and every man and woman who, instead of coming right to the Lord Jesus and accepting Him, surrendering to Him, confessing Him as Master and going forth to serve Him—everyone who is making an excuse of any kind instead of accepting Christ is replying against God. "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"