



The Ultimate Ridicule of the Proud:

Habakkuk 2:18-20

God, who made heaven and earth and every being except himself, has a throne of dominion over all earthly governments and their history. From this throne the Almighty does according to his will, casting down the proud and exalting the humble.

Under his sovereign rule the only true God even makes use of arrogant and violent nations to punish other earthly societies immersed in the defiance of his holy laws. Yet any nation which lives by pride and not by humble faith will be hurled down to ruin when the King of heaven has finished using it. In this manner when a boastful ruler and nation come under the wrath of God, they are exposed as being foolish.

One of the most pompous nations of history was Babylon. Its army raged against the Lord and his Messiah. Yet, it pleased God to employ Babylon to give severe correction to a wayward Judah along with other depraved societies. Even as Babylon was merely beginning to take counsel against the Lord and against his Anointed, the Lord who sat in the heavens *laughed* at them. Mocking taunts in rapid succession were hurled from God's mouth to this wicked nation (Hab. 2:4-19). There is always complete certainty that the proud (both individuals and nations) will fail to succeed in their evil purposes, except insofar as God is using them for his own righteous ends.

The Evils of False Religion

Habakkuk 2:18-20 demonstrates for us what the pinnacle of our Lord's derision of the proud always is. God's ridicule of Babylon had gradually risen in tone (through verses 6, 7, 9, 12, and 15). Now the crescendo of mockery breaks upon the brazen in verses 18 and 19. Here Jehovah lampoons the proud man of all ages for the silliest, the most senseless element of his errant ways:

There is no fear of God before his eyes.

Psalm 36:13

The nation of Judah fell under the whip of Babylon because its citizens had turned their backs on the only true God and had followed false religions in the worship of idols. Now Babylon itself would be destroyed for its own worship of idols. On the night that Darius the Mede captured Babylon and killed Belshazzar, ruler of the kingdom and son of Nebuchadnezzar, the king and his nobles had been drinking from goblets taken from Judah at the sacking of the Temple in Jerusalem. A hand, writing on the wall, supernaturally appeared to the revellers.

The by-now-forgotten Daniel was called to explain this frightening vision. God's prophet reminded Belshazzar that his father had '*acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes*' (Dan. 5:21). Then he added,

'But you his son have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven ... You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honour **the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways**'

Daniel 5:22

The first four of Moses' Ten Commandments have to do with:

1. Whom we worship.
2. How we worship him.
3. The reverence with which we must use his name.
4. What time we must devote to him.

This matter of the fear and worship of the one true God is placed first and is of greater length than the remaining six commands, because it is the most vital element of morality.

Without the existence of a fear of God the remaining commandments will not be established in the life of either a person or a nation. Sin against God, our Maker and Judge, is far more serious than is sin against man. Offences toward men are so wrong because all mankind is made in the image of God. Therefore keeping the last six commands is 'like unto' keeping the first four.

Judgment falls on proud men and nations because they hold God in contempt and devote themselves to false religion. From the earliest days of human life on earth men have invented systems of religion to rival the worship stipulated by the true and living God. While Abel humbly followed divinely-given directives for worship, Cain proudly invented another scheme which seemed *to him* superior to the one dictated by God's words. Later on, shortly after Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth had exited the ark, humanity was worshipping a plethora of gods by means of carved or graven images. Improper worship of the true God and worship of false gods has long involved the use of idols.

When God told Babylon (and all the proud) that their gods and their worship were useless, he was directing attention to the most absurd aspect of human thought and behaviour. *'What profit is the image?'* (Hab. 2:18a).

This plain statement of God Most High should strike confusion into the hearts of all who claim to worship the God of the Bible, but who continue to show reverence to images made by man. Even beyond this the one true and living God is emphasizing the utter futility of *all* humanly-imagined deities and religions. Temporal judgments are dispatched by God for just such sins.

Nations of the West have had fathers in their families and national fathers among their rulers who bowed the knee to the God of Scripture. However, it has become the generally accepted opinion of western nations that equal respect must be shown to all religions. The 'Enlightenment' brought about opposition to the first four commandments. The modern invention of 'toleration', or of giving equal status to all gods and all religions, is nonsense. There is *no* profit to images or to the religious systems which produced them. Yet modern westerners feel themselves noble and honourable for contradicting this foundational declaration of God's Word.

Images teach lies! *'The molded image, a teacher of lies'* (verse 8b). These images are made by men. How, then, can men turn round and put trust in the work of their own hands? There is neither breath nor life in images. How can they help those who worship them? How can they arise and deliver those who pray to them? Images only mislead.

God Our Creator

The God of the Bible is our Maker! He is worthy of trust. He is a Spirit who created all that exists apart from himself. Therefore he has power over all creation. Do not mistake the importance of the Enlightenment's denial of the biblical teaching of creation. That (evolutionary) principle of modern faith represents a human philosophical (not scientific) effort to destroy faith in the Creator of heaven and earth. It is an attempt to reduce the God of Scripture to the level of all man-made idols. Indeed, the reasonings of so-called 'enlightened' man are pure speculations that creation is a falsehood invented by the human mind. He views the doctrine of creation as being similar to the attempts by artists to create a god of their own imaginations.

God Has Spoken

As idols are created, not creators, they are also 'mute' (verse 18d). They do not speak to those who worship them. False religions are filled with religious ideas and words. However, all of these words and thoughts originate with men. Our God has spoken in human language and has recorded his words for us in Holy Scripture. But liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, in keeping with the teachings of the Enlightenment, go to great lengths to turn the Bible into the mere words of men about God.

Denying God's creative work and his revelation in human words has been carried out by massive labours of those who proclaim the thoughts of the Enlightenment. If all religions are reduced to one level it becomes perfectly clear that none of them is of much use. If the God of the Bible can be shrunk so as to fit into the category of idols, neither creating nor speaking, but invented by men, he will be of no more profit than are the most base forms of religion ever to be found.

All of these continuing assaults upon God by the 'enlightenment' of western society are aimed at turning man's trust from God and turning man's ear away from listening to God's words. To the extent that enlightenment proclamations have succeeded in our educational institutions and governments, they have led to an ever-loftier pride within man. Man's mind is now his own object of trust. For instance, the minds of professors in universities, our own minds, and our scientific outlook are considered supreme. Educators, legislators, and scientists are in the business of setting themselves up as having the final word. They are labouring to win to themselves the faith due to God alone. It is all to no profit. For there *is* a God with breath; there *is* a God who produces words. *His* words create and destroy. *His* words show the way to life in this world and the next. *His* words bring all men into final judgment.

The answer to the scheme of western thought is the assertion of Habakkuk 2:20:

*The Lord is in His holy temple.
Let all the earth keep silence before Him!*

All of the babble of men on these subjects, whether they be scholars, rulers, or priests, is impertinent and silly. The reality of the existence of God in his heavenly temple, described in Isaiah 6, Hebrews 12, and Revelation 4 and 5, compels all proud human inventors of worship to be silent before the Creator of all things and the Revealer of all truth.

Secular neutrality is an abandonment of all morality. Secular men in the West presume that they can eliminate religion from practical life and from state decisions. Yet, the wars thrust upon us are of a religious nature. Historically, when Roman Catholics and Protestants ceased facing off their armies in Europe, there was soon a Napoleon attempting to impose the scepticism of the French Revolution on other nations. More recently the fanatical religion of Hitler and yet another one in Japan forced many nations into a world-wide war. Today as then anti-Semitism is roiling among Muslim nations where *Mein Kampf* is popular reading. Military Islam is professedly anti-Jewish and anti-Christian.

Silence before God

To the aggressively proud, God says, '*Be still and know that I am God*':

As if to say, 'I am not like your idol-gods, moulded by your human hands for your own convenience. I made you and shape who you are and where your life will end. I am *not* silent but have spoken. By my words life is given to man, and only by my word will he have eternal life. Silence your opposition to me!'

To the agitated believer God says, '*Be still and know that I am God*':

As if to say, 'I hold in my hand all enemies who threaten you. Although they may do my will, they will never destroy my people! *I* place my servants (Joseph, Mordecai, Daniel and Nehemiah) in the most powerful positions within heathen governments to preserve my people. *I* send angels to keep

her enemies from obliterating my people in the most destructive assaults (Ezek. 9). The gates of Hell will *not* destroy Christ's Church (Matt. 16:18). In the same way no one has erased the Jewish people from this earth, although many have intended genocide against them. Silence your fears!

The infinite distance between the dignity of God and that of all his creatures demands reverent silence before him. He *does* speak, and we are to listen. On the Mount of Transfiguration, God displayed the glory of Christ with unique vividness. In response Peter began to blurt out his ideas of activity and words of admiration for all that he saw. A Voice from heaven interrupted him and said, '*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!*' (Matt. 17:5). Listen to Him! Keep quiet before Him! When God is near and disclosing his own glory a holy hush falls over assemblies of men, the power of which is felt by even the small children present.

So much of modern worship, which calls itself 'Christian', displays a nervousness to fill every moment 'in church' with human doings, human speaking, and human singing. Our God with breath has spoken.

At last he has spoken in his Son. Listen to him! Quiet your hearts, look to him in reverence, and let his words be the dominant element of your worship! Not *your* words, but *his*, are of supreme importance.

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