

Russell Kelfer

God's Truth About Responsibility

544-A

Series: The Beatitudes

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

God's Truth About Responsibility

We return to our study of Satan's lies and God's truth and the resulting conflict that leads to double-mindedness in the life of Christians. In the last lesson, we concluded our look at Satan's lies about authority. It was a study that took us into the realms of parental authority, discipline, rebellion and even patriotism. We finally ended with a look at Satan's challenge to God's final authority. Do you remember what that was? The Word of God, the Word of God, the Word of God. Satan challenged God's truth that the Word is perfect, that the Word is permanent, that the Word is precious, that the Word is personal, that the Word is practical and that the Word is powerful. Because of these truths, the Word should be pre-eminent in the lives of every Christian. The Word of God, the Word of God, the Word of God.

We are nearing the end of our side trip concerning Satan's lies and have come to what is potentially a controversial area for some. After some of the areas covered in this series, I suppose you might wonder what else might be considered controversial. The subject is Satan's lies and God's truth about responsibility. The title of this lesson is, God's Truth About Responsibility: 'The Devil Made Me Do It'. We are going to talk about who is to blame for our problems. How much can we blame on society? How much can we blame on our parents? How much can we blame on God? How much can we blame on Satan?

Satan has captured the mind of man with the lies he has created in this area. Here are his four basic lies concerning responsibility:

- 1- We can blame society for our failures.
- 2- We can blame our parents for our weaknesses.
- 3- We can blame God for our circumstances and our defects.
- 4- We can blame Satan for our besetting sins.

When we get finished, someone is responsible for everything. Satan has robbed the Christian from the capacity to make one of life's most basic statements, "Lord, it is my fault."

Lie 1- Society can be blamed for our failures. The lie is that

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man has a scapegoat for immorality. Remember that from Satan's perspective, nothing is absolute. Therefore, all we have to do is trace the blame for our problems back to another whose behavior justifies ours. If we can't pin down one person, we use the term "society" for our scapegoat.

Let me give you an example of what teachers are hypothetically posing to their students to teach them situation ethics. This example was taken from a teacher's workbook on a seminar called "The Values Clarification Seminar".

Who Is To Blame?

Here is a story in which you will meet several characters. You will be asked to "rank order" them with the person most distasteful to you in the first spot and the person least distasteful to you in the fourth spot. Remember that nobody is right or wrong, but somebody is more distasteful to you than the others. Here is the cast:

A high school student is selling marijuana to junior high school kids because he is desperately in need of money. He needs to get the transmission fixed on his car. He needs the car to get a job as a bus boy at the country club. However, the car he bought, as it turns out, had its transmission filled with sawdust. It was a bad scene. This kept it running just long enough to keep it working beyond the ten-day guarantee given by the used car salesman.

The salesman is the second character. When confronted by the high school student, he said, "Look, that is the way the car was when we took it in. We didn't do anything to it, good or bad. Go see the man who sold it to us."

Passing the buck goes on. Character #1 justifies his behavior, because he needed the transmission fixed so he could keep his job. Character #2 claims it was just ignorance on his part and he couldn't be blamed.

The man who sold the car to the used car dealer is the third character. He sold it in a hurry. He was buying a new house, and he had to raise the money for closing costs quickly or his family would not have a roof over their head. The car he sold was really their second car, and he had planned on fixing it, but he got into a bind and put sawdust in the transmission and sold it for wholesale price. The used car salesman cleaned it up and sold it

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to the high school student for a retail price, and he made \$85.00 profit. The new house buyer said he wouldn't have done what he did if he hadn't been desperate. He blamed the banker, because the banker didn't tell him in advance how much the closing costs were going to be.

The banker is the last character. He claimed that Character #3 should have hired a lawyer to help with the closing, but he was too cheap. The banker said, "It is not my fault that he wanted to save a few dollars and do it himself. We handle too many deals, and we can't keep up with everything. Business is business, and we are in the business of lending money."

This is the situation that the teachers were given. Their job was to rank order these people. The person who was least blameless was to be put in the fourth spot and the person who was the most to blame would be in the first spot. After this was done, the teachers were to break into groups of four to discuss their rankings. The teachers were then given the most logical answers.

The teachers were told that the banker was the person who was the most to blame. He represents cold, unfeeling society. His insensitivity justifies the homebuyer, the used car salesman and the student's immorality. The teachers were told that no one was really right or wrong. The question was, "Who is the most distasteful?"

These same teachers were told that when they were teaching their students that nothing is really wrong and that all behavior is relative. The thought is that society and authority were the culprits for the bad behavior.

Let's suppose you were going to a high school baseball game. Johnny, your son, was on the losing team. Who is to blame? Ninety-nine percent of the time the losing team and those who support it blame the umpires and referees. One right call on his part would have made the difference the supporters think. Christian parents sit at these games and scream and yell, then get in the car with their children and claim that their team would have won, if it wasn't for the bad referee.

Society asks the question, "Who is responsible for alcoholism?" The answer is the pressures of society cause this kind of behavior. "Who is to blame for homosexuality?" The changing moral standards are blamed for this behavior. Rapes, robberies and

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other criminal acts are all blamed upon society because these people have been mistreated, and it is beyond their control to manage their behavior. Society is to blame for the atmosphere that has been created that causes these people to take the actions that they do.

Another way to re-phrase Lie #1 is that we are not responsible for our behaviour. You and I were designed to be personally accountable to God for our behaviors. Our children are to be taught the same thing. This is not what they are being taught in school. This is not what they are being taught on television or other entertainment venues.

As an example, let's take, a couple who has a marriage problem. The wife goes to secular counseling and most of the time the counselor tells her, "You got a bad deal in this marriage. You don't need to submit to him. He is to blame. If your husband is not to blame, society is to blame. The chances of a workable marriage are only 45%. Society is the culprit for your bad marriage. You are not responsible."

What is society? Society is Satan's counterfeit on earth of God's kingdom. It is a physical kingdom where Satan is lord. Physical desires control physical destinies. Physical circumstances are the deciding factors between success and failure. Somebody is always to blame.

When we consider Adam and Eve in the garden, we see this. Jehovah comes looking for them after they have eaten of the tree of knowledge. When He finally finds them, the first statement that comes out of Adam's mouth is, "Lord, it is not my fault. It is the fault of my wife that You gave to me. She is responsible." Eve responds, "Lord, it is not my fault. There was a snake crawling around in the garden, and he made me do it." Do you see the problem? This very structure in society is designed to alienate man from God in order to destroy man's concept of God so that man's image of God is blurred.

Meanwhile, the Christian is spiritually born into a new kingdom while physically living in the old. Whatever society does to assail him, God says, "I will actually use that to strengthen you. Out of society's worst will come My best." Therefore, society can no longer be the scapegoat for the Christian. Do your children know that? Do you know that? Man has been given responsibilities by God. Man is accountable to God for how he performs those

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responsibilities regardless of circumstances that society might throw his way.

Do our children understand that they are first to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their mind and with all their strength no matter what circumstances might come their way, and no matter how they feel about it at the time? Do they realize that they have a responsibility as we see in I Thessalonians 4:11 and II Thessalonians 3:10 to work hard by the sweat of their brow with their hands? Do they understand that this is not only a responsibility but also a privilege? Do they and we understand that Scripturally we are to pay our bills no matter what? We see this in Romans 13,

Owe no one anything except to love one another,
(Romans 13:8 NKJV)

We also see this in Proverbs 3:27-28 as it tells us not to put off paying a debt if you can pay it now. Do they understand that they are to honor their parents no matter what? We see this in Exodus 20:12 and in Mark 7:10. Do they understand that they are to serve their country no matter what, even if it is a war they think shouldn't be fought or if there is a president in office that they don't think should be there? Do they understand that there is a responsibility that a man has to lead his family no matter what, as we see in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1? Do they understand that a man is to love his wife regardless of the circumstances, as we see in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3? Do they understand that they are to submit to the authority that is placed over them, no matter whether they like it or not?

I don't know how many of you are in positions of hiring, but those who are will readily agree that in today's society it is a real experience to interview people for jobs. The first question the applicant asks is, "What are the benefits for me?" God's man ought to say, "What is the will of God and how can I best serve in this job?"

Lie 2- Our parents are to blame for our weaknesses. The world or society, if you will, is teaching our children that most of their weaknesses are the result of broken homes or immature or immoral parents. In a poll listed in a recent magazine 75% of the students interviewed stated that they would like to trade their parents in for someone better. Their favorite movie star headed their "Someone Better List". One teenager looked me straight

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in the eye and said, "My friends and I have talked it over. We didn't ask to be born, so whatever our parents get, they deserve. Whatever we want, they ought to provide." Responsibility? None.

Do your children know that God picked you out from all of the people in the world to be their parents? They ought to. They ought to understand these basic principles regarding parents.

God selects each parent for each child. God has never made a mistake. Psalm 139 tells us,

You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion.

You scheduled each day of my life before I was born.

(Psalm 139:15,16 TLB)

Isaiah 44 says,

Thus says the Lord who made you and formed you from the womb...

(Isaiah 44:2 NKJV)

God's primary goal for parenthood is character development in the child. We often forget this. We think that all we are supposed to do is to keep them out of jail. Deuteronomy 11 tells us we are to teach them because we have seen God. We have seen God's miracles and know what it is to be strong, to have courage, and to be content. We know what it means to be grateful, and what it means to be faithful. Therefore, we are to teach our children these things day and night and the next day and the next night.

Do your children know that God uses negatives as well as positives to develop character? Genesis 50 says,

But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

(Genesis 50:20 NKJV)

Joseph was the object of this passage. He was the object of parental favoritism. This led to peer rejection, which led to unjust persecution. This led to further rejection, until God's mind was finally formed in Joseph.

God commands all of His children to honor their parents as we see in Ephesians 6. Your emotional and spiritual well-being may hang in the balance.

"Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise:

(Ephesians 6:2 NKJV)

As we honor our parents, God becomes responsible to use even their weaknesses for His glory. To blame our parents for our weaknesses is first of all to deny our responsibility to obey and to

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deny God's sovereignty over man.

Romans 9 says,

Who are you to contend with God? Can the clay say to the potter, "Why did you make me like this?"

(Romans 9:20 paraphrased)

Some think that since they have no control over who their parents are they are not responsible for their behavior. That is a lie. You may say, "But my parents have ruined my life by the mistakes they have made." That is not possible. Their mistakes created conditions that you needed to become God's man or woman in the years to come.

Here is how Romans 8:28 works in the family. Each of the negative qualities of a parent creates a problem. However God uses that problem as a stepping stone to produce His potential results for His kingdom. For example, one negative quality of a parent is favoritism to one child. We see this in Joseph's upbringing. This created a spirit of rejection. But God used the spirit of rejection as a vacuum into which the Holy Spirit came. God ultimately turned rejection into humility in the life of Joseph.

Another example is parents who are guilty of deceit. This creates a spirit of distrust. But, God through His Holy Spirit, can take distrust and turn it into a spirit of discernment.

Parents who are guilty of temporal inadequacy so that the family doesn't have enough money for essential needs create physical poverty. The result from God's perspective can be a value system that is not materialistic. You can talk to people who have been in this kind of situation. When God takes control of their lives, you will see what an understanding they have of the real values of life.

Some parents are guilty of having a temper that is out of control. This creates a spirit of fear. God can use this to create a spirit of reverence.

You may have come from a broken home. This creates a spirit of insecurity. However, God can use that insecurity to create a spirit of compassion.

As we mentioned, part of the blame we place on our parents is that of rejection. It is at this point that I want to be most careful. The subject concerns self-image. The culprit is rejection. I firmly agree with all of the needed teaching today about the results of

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personal rejection and the negative self-image that results from this. However, we need to be careful. As always, the danger is not from wrong teaching as much as over-reacting to right concepts. We run the risk of taking concepts out of context until all of our problems come from being rejected. Now we have a new scapegoat.

As we will see in a moment, to some degree it is Satan who is capitalizing on this rejection syndrome among Christians. Rejection by man ultimately leads one to seek acceptance from God. This is a tool in the potter's hand. A self-image, by Scriptural definitions, is not really all that great. Self is supposed to die. Image is supposed to obey. Do you want to be so pleased with yourself that you call on your own self-image to call the shots? I don't think so. You don't need a good self-image, as much as you need to rejoice in God's image.

Paul would have failed most of the modern exams on self-acceptance. Listen to what he said,

Oh wretched man that I am! (Romans 7:24a NKJV)

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints,
(Ephesians 3:8 NKJV)

I am the chief of all of the sinners.

(I Timothy 1:15 paraphrased)

At one point Paul had surveyed all of his earthly credentials and summarized them as "dung, waste and refuse." Talk about your self-image just long enough to see God's design. We are to do this not to blame our parents. God gave you those parents to ultimately give you His image. Without those weaknesses, some of you would be lost today.

Lie 3- God is to blame for our defects and our circumstances. In the heat of the battle, we are unmindful of what we are doing, and we often question the fairness of God, the integrity of God, and the love of God. When times are tough, God is the culprit or so we think. He is sovereign, isn't He? Shouldn't He have prevented this calamity? We think, "If I were God, I would..." Don't ever finish that sentence because it hangs on a disastrous, blasphemous hypothesis.

I think that Job is our best example of how not to respond when difficult circumstances arise and the heat is on. Job was a man after God's own heart, and we are glad about that. But, when the heat was on, he blamed God for everything. In Job 3 he says,

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Let the stars of the night disappear. Let it long for light, but never see it, never see the morning light.

Curse it for its failure to shut my mother's womb, for letting me be born to come to all this trouble.

Why didn't I die at birth?

Why did the midwife let me live? Why did she nurse me at her breasts?

If only I had died at birth, then I would be quiet now, asleep and at rest,

along with prime ministers and kings... (Job 3:9-14 TLB)

Isn't that a great attitude? Don't laugh, you need to examine your own. In Job 7 he says,

Ah, let me express my anguish. Let me be free to speak out of the bitterness of my soul.

Oh God, am I some monster, that You never let me alone?

15 I would rather die of strangulation than go on like this.

I hate my life. Oh, let me alone for these few remaining days.

What is mere man that You should spend Your time persecuting him?

Must You be his inquisitor every morning and test him very moment of the day?

Why won't You let me alone-even long enough to spit?

(Job 7:11,12; 15-19 TLB)

Lie 4- God is to be blamed for our besetting sins and He is laughing at our problems. In Job 9 says,

Innocent or evil, it is all the same to him (God), for he destroys both kinds.

He will laugh when calamity crushes the innocent.

(Job 9:22,23 TLB)

We blame God for not providing a way out. We see this further in Job 9,

And I cannot defend myself, for You are no mere man as I am. If You were, then we could discuss this fairly,

but there is no umpire between us, no middle man, no mediator to bring us together.

(Job 9:32-33 TLB)

Do you see the lies? In chapter 10, Job blames God for not explaining why all of this is happening to him. He says, "God, why don't you tell me why all of these things are happening? I'm not going to be satisfied, if You don't tell me why." We see Job say,

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I am weary of living. Let me complain freely. I will speak in sorrow and bitterness.

I will say to God, "Don't just condemn me-tell me why You are doing it."
(Job 10:1,2 TLB)

Job then blames God for favoring the wicked in verses 3-8. In chapter 13, he blames God for being unwilling to forgive. In chapter 29, he longs for the good old days. In chapter 31, he proclaims his own righteousness once again.

It is interesting to note that God's method to get Job's attention was trouble. God's message to teach him, once he finally quit babbling and started to listen, was to ask him questions he couldn't answer. It is a good teaching method. You might try this sometime with your children.

We not only blame God for our circumstances, we also blame God for our defects, those unchangeable characteristics that set us apart from our peers. The problem in this case is that we don't understand the ways of God. What God is after is a unique ministry for you. To achieve that, He needs a unique message. To achieve that, He allows people, incidents and circumstances to enter your life early that create insecurity, dependence, rejection and weakness. These weaknesses are then the tools that God uses to carve out His message and show His strength through your life.

How many of you have taken the time to chart your own life message? I reviewed this in a lesson two years ago. I want to cover that concept again. There are at least six details that go into a life message.

1- The details of your life begin at birth. The first influence is your parents. You may have had one or two in your home. They may have been harsh, or they may have been loving. They may have been Christians or non-Christians. They may have been partial or just. You may have even come from a foster home or an orphanage. Whatever your circumstances, it is all a part of your life message. It is for a purpose.

2- You have some unchangeable defects. We all have differences in appearance, ability and intelligence. You may be too short or too tall. You may be graceful, or you may be clumsy. You may be slim or heavy. You may be attractive or homely. You may be a blond or brunette. Whatever it is, you may wish it were something else.

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3- We all have some measure of ability. You may be athletic or not. You may have skilled hands, or you may not. You may be a musician or not. You may be an artist or not. You may be a writer or not. You may be a member of the JDDNW Club like me, Just Don't Do Nothing Well. The problem may be intelligence. You may be a Rhodes scholar or not one at all. You may be the head of your class or the heel of your class. Either way, there are some unchangeable defects that you can't control. God knows that, and He loves it.

4- There are times of rejection in your childhood. You may have been rejected by your parents, by your peers, by the opposite sex, by your teachers or by the people you have rejected. Most of us fell into some kind of rejection that left a deep wound and scar in our lives.

5- We all have a name. Some of you like your name, and some of you don't. God chose your name, and the Scripture tells us that He calls us by that name.

6- Everyone has personal traumas. These key influences and people in our lives are what mold us. Certain childhood experiences leave a mark on us. Maybe your health was bad. Whatever the situation, all of these things go into making your life message.

Prior to your conversion, these details made up a battle for self-image. You were trying to compare yourself with everyone. Because of these unchangeable details, because of these rejection points in your life, you had conflict and you had to convince yourself of your worth. This led to ambition where you had to prove yourself. This also led to competition where you had to exalt yourself.

But oh, how beautiful when Jesus came. Death became life. Curse becomes a blessing. Weakness can be turned to strength. Defeat can become victory. Rejection can become acceptance. Your name can now become a character potential as God works a miracle through your life. As the Word begins to take root in your heart, you now have a unique message that no one else has. No one else has that combination of details of life that can produce the divinely unique individual that you are. It is as particular to you as your thumbprint. No two messages are the same. As you surrender to God's image you win the battle for self-image. This leads to a ministry, as we see in II Corinthians 1:3,4, that is based upon the

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uniqueness of your message. This is the concept of a life message.

The Christian should not blame God for his defects. He should thank God for them. He can then cooperate as God deals through them to develop His own life message that is uniquely lived out through him. You have this very special life message.

The fourth lie re-phrased is that Satan is to blame for our besetting sins. I don't want to spend a lot of time on this point, but we must understand the principle. All over Christendom today, we hear the refrain, "I couldn't help myself, Satan overpowered me." In other words, the devil made me do it. Personally, I like that line, except for a few verses like this,

...that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Ephesians 6:11b)

Another one is,

...Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you....

(James 4:7b,8a NKJV)

How about this one,

...because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. (I John 4:4)

Do you see the problem?

The truth of this is found in James,

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:12-17 NKJV)

The Living Bible says that temptation is the pull of man's own evil thoughts and desires, and those evil thoughts lead to evil actions. In other words, it says that it is not God who is

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soliciting you to do evil. He is incapable of that. However, it is not Satan who is forcing you to do evil. He is not strong enough. This passage tells us that it is you wanting to do evil. Why can't we accept the responsibility for that? The key is that when we begin to accept the responsibility, God begins to be accountable.

God is concerned that we would turn to the Scriptural concept of accountability. Society is not to blame for our problems, because society, Satan's counterfeit to the kingdom, ought to be a mirror that reflects what God doesn't want from us. Our parents aren't to blame for our weaknesses, rather God chose our parents, both their strengths and their weaknesses, their successes and their failures so that they could be used for His glory.

God isn't to blame for our defects, because every good and acceptable gift comes from God. The defects He allows us to have are gifts to draw us to the only thing in the world that is perfect, Himself.

Satan isn't to blame for our sins, because just as God can't tempt us, Satan can't make us sin. He is not strong enough. If we resist in the Spirit, God becomes responsible, and Satan must flee. So God is responsible proportionate to our willingness to accept our accountability. That is the truth about man's responsibility. We need to teach it to the generation that is right on our heels. Here are some ways to develop a spirit of responsibility in our children. You may say, "My children are grown." Mine are, too, but we can help raise our grandchildren or share this with couples with young children.

Teach children the principle of accountability. By divine plan, they are responsible for certain things despite circumstances. They are responsible to love the Lord, to honor their parents, to serve their country, to obey authority and to work hard to pay their bills whether they want to or not.

Teach them the truth about sowing and reaping. Show children the cause and effect in life. We need to show them the results of their actions and have them pay the consequences.

Give children room to fail safely. Build a hedge about them the way God builds a hedge about us. There are limits to which Satan cannot go to get to us. However, within the scope of that hedge, God lets us fall and skin our knees again and again. This is the only way we will learn some lessons. Build a hedge, but let them fail.

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Give your children rewards for succeeding. Satan hates this. The basic underlying principle is that Satan wants to deny the truth of God that says one day God will reward the saints. Because Satan hates that, he tries to teach that any system of rewards is bribery. This is a lie.

Teach your children character qualities from the time they are old enough to breathe. Teach them the value of honesty, faithfulness, and truthfulness. Teach them the Word of God on the basis of the character of God.

Teach them to earn money. The right to earn is a gift. The need to earn is a must.

Reward faithfulness with more responsibility. We need to teach our children this principle.

His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

(Matthew 25:21 NKJV)

This is the truth about man's responsibility. God's way is so different from Satan's way. God says that the buck stops here. If I want a good marriage, I have to obey His principles. If I am wronged, I need to be willing to answer without retaliation. If society departs from truth, I must stand more firmly than ever before. God says that the power is His, but the choices are ours. He holds me accountable for how I choose to respond. He holds you accountable for how you choose to respond. He does not hold society, or your parents or Himself or even the devil responsible for what you have done. This is God's truth about responsibility. May we accept it wholeheartedly. May we teach it unashamedly. If we do, the future generations that follow us will thank us enthusiastically.

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