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Leaning into the Hard Work of the Kingdom

Mark R. Rushdoony

A fundamental requirement of covenantal dominion is to work for our freedom from every kind of slavery, to sin, debt, other men, and so on. We are not to seek our freedom through rebellion but through obedience, faithfulness, and godly reconstruction.¹ ~ R. J. Rushdoony

It is easy to claim we are future-oriented, yet because we cannot, as mortals, see the future, we tend to envision one that looks like something we admire in the past as being better. Inevitably, then, we end up trying to reclaim what is long gone. It has often been noted that political “conservatism” lacks vitality because it is past bound, trying to reclaim what is being lost. It is a defensive posture rather than an assertive one. Indeed, the opponents of “conservatism” have been able to brand themselves as “progressives,” which implies, at least, a forward orientation.

We do live in an era of great change, and much is being left behind, including

the capital centuries of Christian ethics built into our culture. Conservatism is usually for something, but it tends to be focused on the antithesis of that something. It becomes a negation and appears past-bound and reactionary; without a future orientation, it increasingly becomes irrelevant. Conservatism often appeals to the lessons of history few know. It tries to draw on the ethical capital of the past but finds that account short of funds.

Progress Requires Work

In the economic sphere, it requires the “sweat equity” of work to take natural resources and create something of greater

value. The only easy way to wealth is theft, which represents not progress but a regression, a dissolution of both wealth and social order. Lawlessness, as well as welfarism and socialism, consume wealth but cannot produce it.

Sometimes it takes a long time, even multiple generations, to see the real benefits of work and thrift. The Industrial Revolution has often been cited as an example of this phenomenon. In its infancy, it offered its workers only a meager subsistence under very grueling conditions. It took time before the increase in wealth it produced created a middle class and changed Western civilization. Likewise, colonies in the

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New World were never immediately successful. Many, including Plymouth and Jamestown, went through periods of high mortality and starvation. Two centuries later pioneers to the American West sacrificed any hope for an easy life in order to be a part of a better future. Their austere life was a long-term investment.

Christian Reconstruction Is Our Work in the Kingdom

In 1965 my father coined the term “Christian Reconstruction,”² which I define as an analogy describing the Christian’s work responsibilities in the Kingdom of God. It was offered as a counter to the view promoted in many churches that Jesus was going to soon return and fix everything. “Wait for Jesus,” was the clear message. In fact, a common statement in such circles was, “Isn’t it great how bad things are? It means Jesus is coming back soon.”

Contrary to their critics’ claims, it must be stated that neither Christian Reconstruction, the dominion mandate, nor postmillennial eschatology suggest man is charged with ushering in the Kingdom. That is the work of God’s Spirit, but these ideas do address an understanding of the believer’s duty of faithfulness. Each assumes the Holy Spirit is remaking all things in terms of the victory of Jesus Christ and the corresponding defeat of Satan. They see man’s responsibilities as a new creature in Christ and his labors in that calling.

Obedience vs. the Easier Way

Jesus knew what His faithfulness looked like. His way was the cross and atonement for sin. In his temptation of our Lord (Matt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-13), Satan twice suggested there were easier ways. Rather than suffering from hunger, Satan told Jesus He should just create bread from stones. Later, he told Jesus he would concede to Jesus if He would worship him. Jesus responded to Satan’s way with, “Get thee behind me, Satan” (Lk. 4:8).

What is easy to miss is that we see Jesus again speak these exact words about three years later to none other than Peter,

just after a benediction on the disciple following his declaration that “thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). What had Peter done to deserve such abrupt rebuke?

Jesus had just begun to teach the disciples that He “must” (Matt. 16:21; Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22) suffer and die at the hands of the religious leaders. Peter at that point took Jesus aside and suggested that was not the way. It was at that point Jesus said, “Get thee behind me Satan” and said to the other disciples, in part: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself; and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24; see also Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23).

Peter may have felt he was expressing a confident faith in the Kingdom of God Jesus had been preaching for several years. He believed in it *as he understood it* and wanted to see it manifested. Peter wanted victory, not defeat, and death sounded every bit like a complete defeat.

Taking Up Our Cross

Jesus’ immediate corrective instruction was a command that we deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus. Too much dualistic nonsense has been promoted based on this text. Taking up our cross is not a command that we must suffer because Jesus suffered.

What was Jesus’ cross? That question answers itself. *His* cross was literally *the* cross, Calvary and the atonement for our sins. The twelve were clueless about the atonement of Jesus until after the resurrection. Do you see the absurdity of Peter rebuking Jesus when He tried to teach them of its necessity? Peter, who believed Jesus was the Messiah, at that point had no idea what that meant, yet he was insisting Jesus listen to him.

Though Peter was clueless, Jesus knew His duty was the way of Calvary, and He was trying to teach that to the disciples. In Gethsemane He submitted to that way because it was the Father’s will, so it was His duty to fulfill. To deny ourself is to do what God has put before us. That is our “cross.” The cross taken up by some might involve suffering or pain, while for others it might be a way

filled with joy and blessing. What is universally true is that to deny ourselves is to repudiate self-will. Though he may have spoken with the best of intentions, Peter’s rebuke of Jesus inserted his will into the eternal providence of God. Thus, the rebuke of Jesus.

“Follow Me”

Once we have denied ourselves by abandoning our will and our plans, we can “take up our cross,” the duty God places before us. It will not be a literal cross, nor will it be an affected “suffering for Jesus,” but rather a fulfillment of our responsibilities in the Kingdom. We either say with Jesus “not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mk. 14:36) or we are playing the part of Satan, suggesting there is a way other than faithfulness.

Peter made his mistake in ignorance, and quickly learned that his way was not God’s. In Acts 2:23 (perhaps six months later) he very clearly understood the necessity of the cross:

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain...

Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible he should be holden of it. (Acts 2:23-24)

But, Peter added,

This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. (vs. 32-36)

Peter was then so clear of God’s way he preached it clearly to our instruction as well as to the 3,000 who that day believed and were baptized (v. 41). He had by then denied himself and rejected

his presumption that it was for him to question God's way. At Pentecost Peter preached God's way very clearly, and he and the remaining disciples then "followed" Jesus in forsaking their way and will and submitting to their "cross," their obedience God set before them. Their cross was their obedience to God's calling. That was the only way they could follow Jesus.

Savoring the Things that Be of God

In rebuking Peter, Jesus explicitly told him his error: "...thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matt. 16:23). The Greek word translated as "offense" references a trap stick set so an animal would "trip it" and be captured. It is also translated in the New Testament as a "fall" or "stumblingblock." Though without the evil intent, Peter's statement, like Satan's at the temptation, was also a trap stick set for Jesus: hence the unequivocal rebuke by the Lord.

Peter made himself a trap stick, a stumblingblock set before Jesus because he "savored" the things of men. Peter was understanding and so thinking as a sinful man when Jesus was trying to teach him what "must" be. Peter missed the part where Jesus said "must," as we so often do. Jesus was not soliciting alternative suggestions. Jesus was instructing the twelve on their duty to be on board with what "must" be.

Johannes Kepler, an astronomer who died in 1630, once described his methodology for understanding the cosmos as "thinking God's thoughts after Him." That is what Peter did not do. Peter did not deny himself and follow Jesus; he injected himself into the divine providence no less so than had Satan. Jesus commanded the opposite, a yielding to God's will, a willingness to follow it. Jesus knew God's will for Him was to suffer and die on the cross, so He would tolerate no opposing suggestion.

Following self-will can lead only to destruction, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25). Peter wanted to "spare Jesus" the

hard way of obedience and so his opinion was repudiated plainly.

Jesus told the twelve that some of them would be alive when the Son of Man came in His Kingdom. Perhaps six months later Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and ascended into heaven, after which the Holy Spirit was manifested at Pentecost. Despite the talk of suffering and death a few months earlier, the Kingdom had been imminent, though its coming was not in a way they could have imagined. The cross and the resurrection represent the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death. His Kingdom was His rightful Lordship over far more than a piece of real estate; the world is His by right. "All power" is His in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18).

Like Peter, we often have no clear understanding of what lies ahead in God's providence. So, Jesus tells us to deny ourselves, our will and wisdom, and savor the things of God. We must think in terms of the things of God. That speaks to our worldview, how we understand, but also to how we act. We take up our cross, whether pleasant or painful, and we follow Jesus; we accept the responsibilities we are given in His Kingdom.

Savoring the things of God begins with thinking in terms of our citizenship in the Kingdom. That is our worldview. Then, taking up our cross is willingly putting our shoulder to the work we are given.

Reporting for Duty

It is not hard to see a very real neglect of duty in the modern church's assumption that they must wait for Jesus to fix everything. The faith has been reduced to personal salvation and a "personal relationship" with Jesus. It focuses on entering in at the narrow gate, but then ignores teaching men "the way" that lies beyond it.

When my father revived the issue of God's law (theonomy) in the modern church in 1973 with the publication of *Institutes of Biblical Law*, his stated objective was to propose it as God's way of sanctification, of obedience in a modern era of moral anarchy and, hence,

increasing degeneracy. A great culpability of the church in my lifetime is that they have refused God's way for their own. Their core response to theonomy has been to ask, "Do we have to obey God's law?" They presumptuously "rebuken" God and say with Peter, "this should not be."

The church has, since 1973, increasingly noted the degeneracy of modern culture, but it has not called Christians to their duty. Its theology is ill-suited to say, "Thus saith the Lord," even to professing Christians. An illustration of this was the intense resistance to homeschooling that emanated from many churches for decades. Homeschooling was assumed by those parents as part of their cross, their duty to their families before God. It was their understanding of faithfulness to God for which they often received criticism or ridicule.

Satan asked Jesus to abandon God's will and do things his way. The scribes and Pharisees always approached Jesus as experts in religious matters, judges ready to challenge His way. In ignorance, Peter tried to impose his vision of the course of the Kingdom on his Lord. But God's revelation often begins with, "I am the Lord." God's prophets reminded us that: "Thus said the Lord." Before we challenge God's Word, we need to stop and ask ourselves the question, "Who do you think you are?"

Getting to Work

It is not our job to suggest alternative plans to God; it is given to us to obey. Salvation should never be treated as a free ticket to heaven, but as a call to duty. We take up that call without question as Jesus took up His duty. Our duty is our "cross." Only when we assume our responsibility as citizens of the Kingdom can we claim to be followers of Jesus. 📖

1. Rushdoony, R. J., *Sovereignty* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2007), p. 34.
2. Rushdoony, R. J., *Faith and Action: the Collected Articles of R. J. Rushdoony from the Chalcedon Report, 1965-2004* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2019), p. 1204.

Inheriting the Earth (Proverbs 2:20-22)

R. J. Rushdoony (*Good Morning, Friends*, Vol. 3, pp. 55-57)

Good morning, friends. Solomon declares, in Proverbs 2:20-22, that the purpose of wisdom is "that thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it."

This is a familiar declaration of Scripture: it is repeated in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). What does it mean? How do the Lord's people inherit the earth?

According to Scripture, they inherit the earth in a double sense. First of all, it is the Lord's people, who walk in faithfulness to Him, who alone truly enjoy the earth. The man who is at war with God is a driven man who races through life without living it, and laps up this world without tasting it. His days are haunted by the shadow of his conscience and by the wrath of God, and his days are feverish with a quest for life in things rather than in the Lord. He talks about enjoying life, but the actuality is that life rather frightens him. In the words of Moses, they "grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in the darkness" (Deut. 28:29). "The sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth" (Lev. 26:36).

The land which the Lord's people inherited was Canaan, and when they walked in faithfulness to the Lord, they possessed the land and reaped its riches in quietness and confidence. Even this fallen world is good and wonderful in all its ways, but too many people are too driven by their evil consciences to be able to enjoy either life or the world. They live in the vacuum of their own tainted hearts, in the emptiness of their lives, in the loneliness of their selfish souls. A million people can pass near them, but they cannot reach out and touch one of them with love and kinship. If they marry, nearness means, not love and wealth of life, but suffering and punishment as it exposes their emptiness and threatens their selfishness.

But the righteous find strength and joy even in trouble and sorrow. Life for them is progressively richer. The simple things of life, eating and drinking, walking and talking, sleep and work, all alike have a richness. Men, women, and children are met and received with a delight in sharing life's common grace. Of them it is said, "ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid" (Lev. 26:6). For the blessed meek, the tamed of God, inherit not only the earth, but in quietness and in confidence they possess their own souls.

But there is a second meaning to this text that points to its fullness. The land of inheritance

of which Solomon spoke was, of course, Canaan, the Promised Land. But Canaan was not the fullness of the promise, but only a foreshadowing, a type of it. The true Promised Land of the chosen people of God is the eternal Kingdom of God.

Both life and the world as we know them represent only a shadow of the glorious reality which is to be ours in Christ. As Paul expressed it, "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). Our life in that Promised Land is a physical life in a resurrected body; it is a life of perfection and of unending joy. It is a life of work, with the curse removed from all labor and the fullness of satisfaction added to it. It is life in Christ and in the presence of God the Father.

This, then, is the purpose of wisdom: to guide us not only in relation to this world, but in relation to the world to come, to make us meek, tamed of spirit, that we might inherit that great Promised Land, the eternal city of God.

Heaven and earth have a great destiny: recreation into the eternal perfection of His Kingdom. And this great inheritance is laid up in store for us who walk by faith in Jesus Christ. 🙌