### ARISE&BUILD

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## THE PROPER WEAPONS OF CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION

### BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE



The scriptures alone determine our choice of weapons and tools in the battles before us. The purpose for the *weapons* is to dislodge every usurping thought, institution, pow-

er, and edifice raised in service to humanism's many presumptuous substitutes for God's kingdom. The purpose of the *tools* is to participate in the building of God's kingdom in our generation. Christian reconstruction is necessarily a two-pronged mission that stands on the respective pillars of dislodging the enemy from every domain of human thought and of building proper foundations for His Kingdom in the rubble left by former generations.

These two pillars are set forth in 2 Cor. 10:3-5 (the pulling down of strong holds) and Isaiah 58:12 (the raising up the foundations of many generations). The former passage has much to say about how we are to prosecute the battle in our midst, while the latter directs our attention to the peculiar nature of the building project entrusted to God's people. We focus first on Paul's instructions on how to conduct the offensive war of ideas.

### **WORLDLY WEAPONS = WRONG WEAPONS**

David Thomas identifies three distinctive elements in Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians concerning weapons the Christian must reject:

Miraculous agency. Miracles, though employed at first, are not the regular weapons by which Christianity fights her battles.

All coercive instrumentality. The civil magistrate now for fifteen centuries has

sought by exactions and penalties to force Christianity upon the consciences of men. Such weapons disgrace and misrepresent it.

All crafty inventions.1

In contrast, the weapons we *are* to use are mighty, because "God goes with His ideas and works by them." Our victories are not over flesh and blood but over mind and spirit:

There is no glory in destroying the bodily life of man. The lion, the bear, a poisonous gust of air, will excel men in this. The victories of a true soldiership are over *mind*. And indeed you do not conquer the man unless you conquer his mind.<sup>3</sup>

This last point continues to resurface in modern culture, as witness a scene in the Star Trek franchise where a martial opponent of Worf the Klingon says, "I cannot defeat this Klingon: I can only kill him."

J. R. Thomson explains why our weapons are designed by God as they are:

Christianity does not contend with physical powers, does not aim at the mere regulation of outward and bodily acts. It strikes at antagonists far more powerful than any which are dealt with by the powers of this world. *Thoughts* ... these are the source and spring of all the outward evils that afflict and curse mankind. If these can be mastered, society may be regenerated and the world may be saved.<sup>4</sup>

E. Hurndall then explains why the right choice of weapon is so critical to the outcome of the battle.

Carnal weapons seem strong. They impress men. Paul's weapons, which are

ours, are apt to excite ridicule on the part of fleshly men, who judge by outward appearance. But the apostle contends that these weapons are mighty. They have done what all others have failed to do.<sup>5</sup>

Hurndall states of our weapons that "they are mighty before God. *Through* God, but also *before* God, i.e., in His judgment. They come from His armory. They are specially fashioned by Him for this strife." We often see the correct sense buried in a footnote, as when Barnett says that "a superlative sense may be implied by *dunata to theo*, 'powerful to God, therefore exceedingly powerful' (cf. LXX Jonah 3:3)" We will return to this point.

### **WORLDLY WEAPONS = WEAK WEAPONS**

David Garland provides the basis for rejecting the weapons of the world in this battle:

"To wage war according to the flesh" means that one relies on flimsy human resources that are void of any divine power and that one is likely to resort to shameful, underhanded means to gain the desired victory. Paul's methods are not fleshly methods. He does not rely on cunning or deception to insure that he will win. His power is God's power, which means that he fights according to God's rules of engagement.<sup>8</sup>

Everyone in the ancient world knew, however, that the advantage was always on the side of the attacker with his siege engines and not with the fortified city. No matter how well defended cities might be, they would eventually fall to the resourceful and determined general. How much more is this the case on the spiritual level when "the city" is up against God's weaponry? Human bulwarks and parapets, no matter how high and lifted up, can never withstand God's power.<sup>9</sup>

### **EVERY HIGH THING**

Regarding "every high thing,"
Plumptre holds that St. Paul is drawing a
military connection between these and the
"strongholds" of the unregenerate mind to
be pulled down, so:

Every high thing that exalteth itself. – The noun probably belongs, like "strong-

hold," to the language of military writers, and indicates one of the rock fortresses, the "towns piled high on rocks precipitous" (Virgil) which were so conspicuous in all ancient systems of defence.<sup>10</sup>

This suggests a contrast with the rock fortresses that God provides when His people walk in integrity: "He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." (Isa. 33:16) "Munitions of rocks" can also be rendered "fortresses of rocks" or a "mountain fortress" (NIV).

There are two important takeaways. *First*, we must recognize that we do live at a time when the humanists extol their rock, and we are to extol our Rock. St. Paul has alerted us to the existence of their rocks and their rock fortresses and strongholds and how to pull them down, and what tools alone are to be used to pull them down. We've already been informed that "their rock is not like our Rock," so a defeatist attitude exhibits contempt for the confidence the Scripture places in our Rock.

Second, there is only one path to get to the "munitions of rocks" that God provides us: by observing the path of moral integrity laid out in the preceding verse, Isa. 33:15 – "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil."

We have drawn attention to Isaiah 33 twice before, in 2020<sup>11</sup> and in 2024,<sup>12</sup> and have yet to exhaust its meaning and application for us. What we must recognize is that Paul is also identifying which weapons we are to use in lieu of worldly ones. As Trent Casto puts it, "a ministry that God commends fights the right battles, with the right weapons, in the right manner."<sup>13</sup>

### FIGHTING THE WAR GOD'S WAY

We have a two-fold problem: there are Christians who won't fight at all, and there are Christians who have plenty of fight in them continuing to damage the cause of Christ by their choice of weapons. Casto summarizes the issue well:

For a long time, many Christians understood our engagement in the world

as a culture war. In engaging that war, we have primarily used the weapons of our culture: outrage, boycotts, sarcastic memes, cancel culture, name-calling, and ad hominem attacks. If this is the battle we are fighting, and the manner in which we are fighting it, we are not engaging in a ministry that God commends.<sup>14</sup>

When the culture warriors notice someone not dancing when they pipe (Matt. 11:17), they denounce the man in the way Paul's opponents critiqued him, as in this assessment by Philip E. Hughes: "Paul's diffidence, his humility, and his forbearance were twisted by his detractors into a despicable charge of cowardice and impotence." Before quoting Hughes, Casto uses the analogy of "people on social media who are as bold as lions when hiding behind a keyboard" to set the stage for us.

Of course, 2 Cor. 10:3-6 is concerned with *how* to fight, and the *purpose* for the fight, so it should shape and frame our warfare in every particular. Only in this way can the high things be pulled down properly, leaving no root behind from which new weeds can germinate. Verse 3 is clear that we are not to wage war according to the flesh, while the subsequent verses instruct us which weaponry to use and which to reject. We routinely choose forbidden weapons and wonder why we were defeated while wearing Saul's armor.

Casto concludes by quoting J. Gresham Machen's 1912 challenge to his students at Princeton Seminary.

The Christian cannot be satisfied so long as any human activity is either opposed to Christianity or out of all connection with Christianity. Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but also all of human thought. The Christian, therefore, cannot be indifferent to any *branch* of earnest human endeavor. It must all be brought into some relation to the gospel. It must be studied either in order to be demonstrated as false, or else in order to be made useful in advancing the kingdom of God. ... The church must seek to conquer not merely every man for Christ, but also the whole of man.<sup>17</sup>

In this case, the translation of "every thought captive" is actually better taken to mean (after Meyer) "every creation of

thought, every product of the human thinking faculty. "18 Note how tightly this dovetails with Cornelius Van Til's mission, which targeted precisely this aspect of the human mind's rebellion against the Creator. This mission, to take every thought captive, places the rational faculty of man in the crosshairs, focusing on "every product of the mind that takes the field against Christianity." The goal is victory in the widest possible sense of the word, as Meyer explains here:

*All* of this is by Paul and his companions brought into *captivity*, and thereby into *subordination to Christ*, after the bulwarks are destroyed, etc. Thus the holy war comes to the goal of complete victory.<sup>20</sup>

There may be well-known pastors who insist that "down here, we lose," but Paul isn't buying any of it.

Failure to understand that Christians are called to war, and to become more than conquerors in this battle, is endemic. But Paul here is urging precisely such a responsibility. As Hughes puts it, "That the Christian life is not merely a walk but a warfare is, indeed, a favorite theme with Paul (cf. Eph. 6:11ff; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:3f., 4:7) and in our epistle (6:7)."<sup>21</sup>

### MIGHTY IN GOD'S SIGHT

We draw attention now to the imprecise translations that mar the description of the weapons of our warfare. For instance, the King James renders verse 4 this way: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for the destruction of strong holds." The phrase "mighty through God" is an attempt to paraphrase the Greek but fails to capture its meaning. The ASV and World English Bible are much closer to the correct translation with the phrase "mighty before God." Renderings like "divinely powerful" miss the mark, substituting noble turns of phrase for Paul's actual wording.

Darby comes closer in rendering the phrase as "powerful according to God," but faulty renderings by others are rampant ("power from God," "mighty in God," "made powerful by God," etc.). *Young's Literal Translation* again gets closer with "powerful to God." In the cases where the

translators were striving for accuracy, we see that the key element is *God's assessment of the weapon*, and not what God supposedly invests the weapon with.

H.A.W. Meyer thus takes "dynati to theo as mighty for God, i.e., passing with God as mighty, which denotes the true reality of being mighty."22 These weapons are the only weapons that God regards as mighty. Noted New Testament scholar Henry Alford renders the term "powerful in the sight of God (i.e., 'in His estimation,' 'after His rule of warfare.')"23 Alford flatly adds that others have rendered Paul's words "wrongly."24 Ralph P. Martin lists this meaning first: "(1) in God's sight, they are powerful."25 A. R. Fausset concurs, asserting that the Greek "mighty to God" means "before God."26 J. H. Bernard agrees it means "mighty in God's sight, in His estimation."27

John Peter Lange provides the correct translation and its meaning:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty before God for the pulling down of strong holds. The Apostle here describes the kind of weapons he used, i.e., the means by which he carried on his ministry in contrast with those of his adversaries. ... The Apostle brings into positive contrast with the carnal (sarkika) not the spiritual (pneumatika) but the mighty in God's sight (dynati to theo). The fleshly is also that which is feeble, and especially when it is in conflict with the world for the cause of God, it is entirely powerless. ... dynata is more particularly defined by to theo to mean that which is powerful in God's esteem, before God.<sup>28</sup>

When fleshly weapons are pressed into service for God, they are feeble and "entirely powerless" as Lange points out. But this doesn't stop Christians from using the wrong weapons anyway.

Just because God defines which weapons are mighty doesn't mean humans will agree – even regenerate humans. Men routinely despise God's methods, His weapons, and seek out weapons that men think are effectual. This rejection of God's position not only retards the growth of God's kingdom, but it helps secure the unregenerate in their rebellion against God.

Wrong weapon, wrong end result. The "high things" that were to have been pulled down were things "by which the enemy strives to maintain his ground."<sup>29</sup> By using worldly weapons, God's enemies not only maintain their ground, their strongholds grow even taller.

Hughes, in commenting on 2 Cor. 10:4, draws the same conclusion in pointed terms (note the final words in his assessment here):

Only spiritual weapons are divinely powerful for the overthrow of the fortresses of evil. This constitutes an admonition to the Church and particularly to her leaders, for the temptation is ever present to meet the challenge of the world, which is under the sway of the evil one, with the carnal weapons of this world – with human wisdom and philosophy, with the attractions of secular entertainment, with the display of massive organization.<sup>30</sup>

One such carnal weapon that leverages "the display of massive organization" is the economic boycott. We have commented repeatedly on this tactic, showing scripturally why it should have no place in our armory, but the temptation Hughes describes above continues to sway well-meaning Christians to use the world's weapons despite the compelling biblical arguments against boycotts (quite aside from Paul's teaching here).

### **WE ARE TO WAGE WAR DIFFERENTLY**

Ralph P. Martin's rendering of 2 Cor. 10:3 brings the kind of clarity we need at this juncture. "For though we are living in this world, we do not carry on a war as the world does." Dr. Rushdoony, in his commentary on the Corinthian letters, paraphrases Paul's meaning thus: "We live in this world where men think only of considerations humanistically; but we are not to wage war against anything or anyone after the flesh." 32

Further, the casting down of these strongholds is actually necessary for the eternal benefit of those hiding inside of them: such men remain chained inside their strongholds until the truth sets them free. Hughes says of the intellectual tower raised up by the unregenerate man that "unless it is cast down by the gospel

of God's grace in Christ Jesus, his tower becomes his tomb."<sup>33</sup> In turn, when Christians prosecute their warfare according to God's plan to take every thought captive, "the capture proves to be a radical liberation, for only in unconditional surrender to God, his Creator, Redeemer, and Judge, is man's freedom to be found."<sup>34</sup>

Many expositors believe Paul is applying Prov. 21:22 in 2 Cor. 10:3-5, so a glance at that passage is warranted. Hughes renders it, "A wise man scales strong cities and casts down the stronghold in which the ungodly trusted." Delitzsch explains the basis for this man's success in this battle:

If a city is defended by ever so many valiant men, the wise man knows the point where it may be overcome, and knows how to organize the assault so as to destroy the proud fortress. With *wisdom* he brings it to ruin.<sup>36</sup>

The source of wisdom, so far as Proverbs is concerned, is always the law-word of God. As in Eccl. 9:13-17, also cited in connection with Paul's argument here, wisdom is better than strength, and it is wisdom that alters the course of history – not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord (Zech. 4:6).

### **GOD'S ENEMIES ATTACK THE FOUNDATIONS**

One of the significant achievements of antichristian humanism is pulling morality out of the world and reinserting it exclusively in the political domain. Morality flows from the god of any system, and where the state is god, morality follows that god into the political realm. Dr. Rushdoony explains the dynamics of this deadly transition:

As Hampson pointed out, the Rousseauists identified politics with morals (*Prelude to Terror*, p. 42). The Biblical identification of morality with religion, with God and His law-word, was denied. Morality was now an aspect of political order. Religion was now limited to purely spiritual concerns and with the hereafter. This world and its moral order were now the province of the state. ... Marxist and democratic countries began teaching a new morality, a situational one usually, in the state's schools. The church's protest has been scarcely more than a whisper. ... Wherever there was a

separation of Biblical law from morality ... there a civil and moral barrenness prevailed. Christianity went from being the shaping power of society, to become an unessential thing on the sidelines...<sup>37</sup>

We find ourselves here because Christianity has, in Rushdoony's words, substituted *loyalty to the form* for loyalty to the faith, to the Scriptures, to the law-word of God, and to the King of kings. Rushdoony calls this "loyalty to the form (with a treason to the content)" and in this one phrase he has captured the tragedy of the church in our day. For such a humanistic system to advance, "the opponent must be driven away and crucified on side issues" to avoid any focus on actual substance. Attention is, by design, *diverted away from the foundations*.

It is here that Rushdoony points the way forward, calling for the reversal of the current moral and cultural erosion:

The meaning of subversion is "to overthrow from the very foundations; utterly destroy; bring to ruin, as by moral or political force." The present civil war of the West is aimed at those "very foundations." The enemy cannot be destroyed except in terms of those foundations. Men who stand on anything less will be swept aside. Karl Marx based his war against the West on "criticism of religion" as "the premise of all criticism." In answer we must say that the overthrow of all subversion rests on the foundation of the orthodox Christian faith. <sup>40</sup>

In this light, we find ourselves now at the place where 2 Corinthians 10 and Isaiah 58:12 meet. We must stand on the proper foundations to pull down the entrenched humanistic strongholds in evidence all around us, while Isaiah informs us of our second obligation: to raise up "the foundations of generation and generation" (this is the literal Hebrew, often translated as "many generations"). Just as God's enemies have raised up high things against the knowledge of God, we ourselves have an obligation to not only pull those things down but to raise up the foundations that will exhibit the "durability" that Alec Motyer refers to in the preceding verses.<sup>41</sup>

### **ISAIAH 58:12**

Taken in its entirety, Isaiah 58:12 tells us what His people will do ("they that shall

be of Thee shall build"), where they will build ("the old waste places"), what they will build ("raising up the foundations") and for whom ("for many generations") and what they will be called ("repairer of the breach," "restorer of the paths to dwell in"). The passage assumes things at their worst, that we're looking at renovating a cesspool. We're to build new foundations because the previous foundations "were destroyed" (Ps. 11:3), so the answer to the Psalmist's question as to what the righteous can do is letter-simple: raise new foundations while not despising the day of small beginnings.

As important as Paul's program in 2 Cor. 10:3-5 is, it is intended to clear the ground for the enterprise that Isaiah puts forward for God's people. Alec Motyer puts it this way regarding "the blessings of restoration and continuance":

Your people is 'those from you,' i.e., those yet to be born. This is a promise of continuance and blessing reaching into coming generations (Ex. 20:6; Pr. 20:7) and extending from recovery of past disaster (ancient ruins) to provision for future well-being (Streets with Dwellings). ... Isa. 1:6ff. indicates the relevance to Isaiah's day.<sup>42</sup>

J. A. Alexander expands on the passage this way:

But as the term proper means *from thee*, it denotes something more than mere connection, and, unless forbidden by something in the context, must be taken to signify a going forth from Israel into other lands. Thus understood, the clause agrees exactly with the work assigned to Israel in chaps 48:14, and 57:11; viz., that of reclaiming the apostate nations, and building the wastes of a desolated world.<sup>43</sup>

This is where the other shoe drops. We must not only fight the battle properly, we must also build new foundations as well. One without the other is a half-way house at best. Oswalt's exposition drops the obligation to restore the paths to dwell in right into our laps:

God promises to His people that ruin and destruction are not the last word for the fallen human race. It is true that we are deeply sinful, and that sin destroys everything it touches. Nevertheless, God is stronger than our sin, and He is able to give us the power to restore and renew what was destroyed. ... the actual [rebuilding] agents will be the people themselves. If it was their sin that destroyed the city, it will be their righteousness through the grace of God that will rebuild it.<sup>44</sup>

### POSTSCRIPT: APPLICATIONS THAT ABIDE

In reconstructing any discipline, a biblical foundation alone guarantees longevity. In economics, the life's work of Dr. Gary North will stand the test of time because his economic commentary is anchored in Scripture while its weaknesses are few. The Word of God is the solvent of all institutions not based on itself, so this work tears down strongholds while building new foundations. *Every* subject must be dealt with at this level of commitment (see Machen's quote earlier).

Dr. E. Calvin Beisner's Where Garden Meets Wilderness45 from 1997 was an excellent first strike in applying biblical principles to the environmental sciences. An opposing book in 2021 by professing Christian Dr. Katharine Hayhoe which I reviewed46 only had four scripture references, posing no challenge to Dr. Beisner's work, but the intellectual landscape has changed: two volumes of an Eco Bible covering Genesis-Exodus<sup>47</sup> and Leviticus-Numbers-Deuteronomy<sup>48</sup> have recently appeared. Whereas Hayhoe's biblical case for massive statist intervention, etc., was scant, these newer volumes are thick with biblical exposition (often tendentious, but requiring a response).

In short, co-opting (some might say hijacking) the scriptures in support of humanistic agendas has taken a step forward. The *Eco Bible* arguments are often specious: the burning bush shows support for sustainable energy sources, the axe head that kills someone accidentally proves logging is a bad/dangerous idea, etc. Some of the expositions are quite valid, but we've been served notice that the biblical high ground will be ceded to *those willing to do the work*.

The strongholds we need to scale have grown taller. We pray for an army of Dr.

Norths each taking every thought captive in every field. The *Eco Bible* proves that humanists never had any intention of staying in their lane. The good news is that God owns all the lanes.

Eccl. 9:14-15 tells us of a mighty king besieging a small town, and how a poor wise man arose to thwart the attack. Dr. Rushdoony did precisely this when Texas officials gathered to outlaw homeschooling in the 1980s. As Delitzsch said a century ago, "The king ... met therein with such an one, against whom his plan was shattered." Dr. Rushdoony used the right weapons, the right way, at the right time, to shatter the state's plans, proving that "wisdom is better than weapons of war" (Eccl. 9:18).

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## Humanism is collapsing, but is the Church ready to govern in Christ's name?

In ushdoony predicted the times in which we live which is why he focused the mission of Chalcedon on the great work of Christian Reconstruction. The only remedy to what we face is a return to Christian faith, character, and obedience.

Rushdoony wrote, "The Biblical doctrine of theocracy means the self-government of the Christian man," (Sovereignty, p. 31) which means the Christian most needs the resources to equip him for Biblical self-government.

The Chalcedon Foundation is a "think-tank for the self-governing Christian," and our mission is to equip Christian families and churches to apply the faith to every area of life and cultivate faithfulness to God's law and covenant in order that Christ's Kingdom might increase.

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