

ARISE & BUILD

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REVILERS OR RECONSTRUCTIONISTS?

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE

“That’s referring to somebody else. That’s not me.”



This is a fairly common response when we read Paul’s list of those who won’t inherit the Kingdom of God in 1 Cor. 6:9-10. The ten categories listed are representative, not exhaustive,¹ and it’s easy to read the list carelessly as we get toward the end: fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners. Lenski observes that “Paul writes objectively, yet any one of the members in Corinth who needed a warning can apply what he says to himself.”

Have we Reconstructionists lost the ability to apply divine warnings to ourselves, or to even pay attention to the detailed ways in which unrighteousness crops up in our conduct? One has to wonder.

It is particularly notable that Paul includes “revilers” in his list. What are revilers? R. J. Rushdoony lays out a clear definition:

Revilers are those who, as their own gods, are in constant judgment on all other men.²

This is an important definition which we will return to shortly.

Paul’s list evolves as he writes. In 1 Cor. 5:9 he tells us not to keep company with fornicators. The next verse expands to four classes: fornicators, the covetous, extortioners, and idolaters. In verse eleven

he adds the drunkard and the reviler to the list, and revilers appear in chapter six as noted. We’re not even to eat with a reviler: their conduct is *unrighteous* and excludes one from the Kingdom of God.

The word for revilers is *loidoroi*, which is “used of *injuring* another’s reputation by denigrating, abusive insults.”³ The variant *loidoros* means “to say harsh things,” “make verbal assaults,” “using *mean-spirited, insulting* words to demoralize (humiliate),”⁴ and it generally “covers all forms of verbal abuse—to malign, revile, slander.”⁵ The NET Bible translates the term as “the verbally abusive.”

The word *revilers* appears in these “vice lists” for a reason. The list itself has a purpose: “The vice lists serve as a kind of electrified fence that warns about the limits of admissible conduct.”⁶ Consequently, *revilers* are an important part of this *electrified fence* that we are not free to ignore or trivialize.

Paul’s response to being himself reviled is to bless in return (1 Cor. 4:12—“being reviled, we bless”). To revile in return when we are being reviled is not part of our tactical weaponry and finds no counterpart in the armor of God. Small wonder: reviling excludes us from the Kingdom of God, and Paul asserts that we deceive ourselves if we think otherwise (1 Cor. 6:9).

At least one transliteration of the word treats it as a compound term: *revilers* are literally *say-SPEARers*—those

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who plunge a verbal spear into someone else.⁷ When Paul says “and such were some of you” in the next verse, we need to ask ourselves if that past tense really applies to us, or if our current conduct is implicated.

What Dr. Rushdoony brings out so clearly is the element of “constant judgment on all other men,” for reviling is nothing if not a judgment upon the character, conduct, intellect, integrity, or other attribute of the target. Rather than letting God judge, we elbow God out of the way and do the judging for Him. Man prefers to be in “constant judgment on all other men” because it places man on top as judge, as the standard of right and wrong, truth and error.

This is precisely why Rushdoony says the revilers act “as their own gods”: because they usurp God’s prerogative. God, after all, might be silent, “testing the sons of men with His eyelids” (Psalm 11:4),⁸ and the reviler then justifies his words as needful and righteous. His words are neither of these things—rather, they exclude him from inheriting the Kingdom of God.

BUILDING CHARACTER OR REVEALING IT?

Social media, such as Facebook, are venues that often bring out the worst in people, whether Christian or not, Reconstructionist or not. The underlying principle is laid out by Rushdoony when discussing politics and marriage:

Politics is an area of order, not the means to order. Similarly, marriage is an area of order, not the means to order and peace. A man and woman who are at peace with God and with one another can establish godly order in marriage because they bring order and peace to marriage. Marriage simply gives greater scope for the already existing condition and allows its extension, and, conversely, if there is neither peace nor order in the life of man, marriage will increase the scope of his disorder.⁹

This is what we see in social media: it increases the scope of man’s disorder.

These venues become mirrors that show us who we truly are, and the picture is often an ugly one. Yet we’re prone to double down on our ugliness. In other words, our conduct on Facebook reveals our character by giving greater scope to what we bring to it.

Moreover, there is a contagious element to reviling: seeing other Christians, especially respected ones, indulge in it can numb us to its dangers. As A. R. Fausset pointed out, “There is less danger of associating with open worldlings than with carnal professors.”¹⁰ Matthew Henry observed that Christians tend to be “naturally upon their guard” around the unregenerate and worldly men: “They are apt to have a horror at their wicked practices. But the dread of sin wears off by familiar converse with wicked Christians.”¹¹

Therefore, beware the leaven of the revilers who identify as Christians.

THE FIRST OF TWO EXAMPLES WE SHOULD FOLLOW

In Jude 9, we read about Michael disputing with the devil over the body of Moses. The point that Jude makes is how Michael speaks to the devil. Michael “dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (NKJV). Other versions render the term as “railing accusation” or “railing judgment,” which *Young’s Literal Translation* renders “an evil-speaking judgment.”

Michael doesn’t dare to do this, but men in their presumption actually believe that they know better how to deal with others.

Consider the comments of Puritan commentator Thomas Manton concerning the key lesson we need to extract from Jude:

Railing and reviling must not be used with the worst adversary in the best cause.¹²

This is remarkably clear instruction. You and I cannot possibly have a worse adversary than Michael had been disputing with, and Michael’s cause is better than

any cause we could possibly be promoting today. So, we can *never* argue that our adversary is so bad or foolish that he or she deserves to be reviled by us, or that our cause is so important and noble that reviling is justified. Jude 9 tears any such pretensions to pieces.

Manton clarifies the issues so well that we quote his comments at length here:

Such reproaches come from an evil principle, contempt, or passion, all evidence of pride. A person who thinks too highly of himself disdains other people. When he is crossed he becomes angry, like a full stream hitting a dam.

Such reproaches are most unsuitable in matters of religion. The God of peace is not served with an angry spirit, and Christ's battles need no worldly weapons. Christianity, of all religions, is the meekest and most humble; the foundation of it is the slain Lamb. Those who are called to inherit a blessing should not curse people. "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:9).

These kinds of reproaches go directly against the Word. The Scripture is a great friend to the peace of human societies, for it condemns the slightest offensive word and gesture. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk..." (Isaiah 58:9). God wanted the pointing finger, a gesture of indignation, put aside as well as the yoke of oppression.¹³

In a world of unrestrained passions and bitterly pointing fingers, with the flow of "constant judgment on all other men" as Rushdoony says, we are faced with a choice. The right choice is to obey God and be transformed from current revilers into former revilers. The alternative is to continue to build in vain.

Jude sets forth Michael as the example to follow. It is an example which demolishes all attempts to justify and rationalize our reviling of others: nobody had a worse adversary than Michael, nor a more noble cause, but reviling is

something Michael didn't dare to do. Do we dare to revile others in the face of Michael's refusal?

Much reviling is justified by thinking that "the ends justified the means." Utilitarian humanism propounds this unbiblical standard. That dangerous mindset infected the thinking of Caiaphas, who argued that "it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50). To think as Caiaphas thought that the ends justifies the means is to abolish justice and rectitude, making us unfit for the Kingdom. Not surprisingly, Caiaphas reviled those who didn't see the solution he had intuited (John 11:49). When we justify our misconduct, we deepen our misconduct.

A SECOND EXAMPLE TO CONSIDER

We don't omit Christ as the captain of our salvation, of course, as He is the preeminent One to follow. Christ as our Example is surely a given for everyone who names His Name.

But since we're talking about Reconstructionists, we might consider that R. J. Rushdoony also set an example of how to avoid being a reviler. He was at the focal point of perpetual vitriol and venom from within and without God's church. He made his strategy clear to all who would ask: "I do not let my enemies set my agenda for me." In other words, he didn't respond to the attacks, though the onslaught lasted for decades from all quarters.¹⁴ "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" was a perpetual counsel governing his conduct. He was a man who understood that he served the Prince of Peace.

There *is* a time for war (Eccl. 3:8), but reviling is not to be a weapon of war for us. Consider Rushdoony's warfare in the courtroom at the January 7, 1987 Leeper trial in Texas,¹⁵ where he secured the rights of homeschoolers to operate without state molestation. Here is an abiding model for how to fight for a righteous cause, without falling into the unrighteousness of reviling.

The Kingdom of God is not advanced by a process of negation, by diminishing others. It is to be built up in God's way. "Not by might nor by power," we're told (Zech. 4:6).

The fact of the matter is that Christian Reconstruction can advance without its proponents becoming revilers, without flinging verbal spears. In previous issues of *Arise & Build* we've continually drawn attention to the nature of the work. Making straight the way of the Lord involves the humble, painstaking work of casting rocks out of the path.¹⁶ Zechariah 1:18-21 specifies God's chosen tools to overcome opposition: "Not other 'horns' to push against these; not other men of war to overcome these; but artificers only, men of peace."¹⁷

God's rule is compared to gentle, quiet waters but men prefer the trappings of power and force, "forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly [God's way], and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son [man's way adorned with glory and power]" (Isa. 8:6).

The Kingdom of God is not advanced by a process of negation, by diminishing others. It is to be built up in God's way. "Not by might nor by power," we're told (Zech. 4:6). We do not revile our way to victory. This periodical is not called *Arise & Revile*, it is *Arise & Build*. Reconstruction will not advance at the point of verbal spears. That path leads away from the Kingdom of God.

If you now must choose between your favorite theologians and what St. Paul teaches, it's best you make that choice sooner than later. Their leaven will rub off on you. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Prov.

25:28). Reconstructionists should never be "in constant judgment on all other men"—they are to be a blessing in the earth. 🏠

1. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 248.
2. R. J. Rushdoony, *Commentary on First and Second Corinthians* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, forthcoming 2021), loc. cit.
3. HELPS Word-studies, no. 3060, quoting from *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 4:293.
4. HELPS Word-studies, no. 3058.
5. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, [1987] 2014), p. 246.
6. D. E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: 2003), p. 188, quoted in Fee, op. cit., p. 246, n.150.
7. <https://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/NTpdf/1co6.pdf>. I have preserved the original capitalization.
8. The psalmist is saying that God appears to have closed His eyes to man's problems and outcries, not responding, thus testing the sons of men with His eyelids (which seem to be closed from man's perspective).
9. R. J. Rushdoony, *Revolt Against Maturity* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, [1977] 1987), p. 53.
10. Jamieson, Fausset & Brown *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, reprinted 1982), vol. 3, part 3, p. 297.
11. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: McDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), vol. 6, p. 531.
12. Thomas Manton, *Jude* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, [1657] 1999), p. 155.
13. *ibid*, pp. 155-156. Manton concludes with an appeal to Psalm 43:3—"O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me." We're not to be led by our anger and passions but by God's light and God's truth.
14. Psalm 41:9
15. [scribd.com/document/372067426/The-Leeper-Trial-Transcript](https://www.scribd.com/document/372067426/The-Leeper-Trial-Transcript)
16. chalcedon.edu/magazine/the-crooked-shall-be-made-straight
17. Spence, H. D. M. and Joseph S. Exell, ed., *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), vol. 14, chapter on Zechariah by W. J. Deane and W. S. Lewis, p. 9. See <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/the-smiths-of-zechariah>

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THE DIVIDED STATES OF AMERICA

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY



After the American Civil War, public school textbooks began emphasizing the virtues of “democracy.” The process of democracy, not liberty under law, was presented as the process that made the American system work, the source of its greatness. At the same time, however, we have a great deal of historical and contemporary evidence that the democratic process has always been infected with, if not controlled by, blatant lies and fraud. The term “politician” early became synonymous with an opportunistic, self-serving fraud. Mark Twain once said, “... I can never think of Judas Iscariot without losing my temper. To my mind Judas Iscariot was nothing but a low, mean, premature, Congressman.” Far from a refining process, our political system has been a method whereby men of the lowest character are elevated to positions of power.

One of the reasons Americans bought into a faith in the democratic process was their assumption that it would move us further towards a just social order. To believe that, it was necessary both to think men generally had similar ideas of what justice was and to believe those standards would be ethically defensible. Justice is a moral concept of what is right and wrong, what should be tolerated or required on the one hand or discouraged or forbidden on the other. As a moral position, it is necessarily religious in nature. Even as America became less Christian its moral ethic long remained largely Christian, so its view of justice was, with some exceptions, rather predictable; it fell within certain bounds. As America religiously moved further away from Christianity, other standards of morals, and hence justice, were prominently advocated, and

we became increasingly divided. Marxism, for instance, must redefine the theft condemned in the eighth commandment as just, and then its violation of the sixth commandment against murder as a necessary step against those who resist this new moral order. Democracy seemed to work until the Christian ethic was abandoned and a hostility to Christian history and faith was added, and our political process became a polarized conflict of worldviews.

WHAT DO WE HAVE IN COMMON?

Many years ago, I heard my father say that *community necessitates communion*, that there can be no *community* if there is nothing shared in *common*, and what held America together for many years was its common Christian faith and ethic. The difference between Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists in the 19th century were far less than now. They sang many of the same hymns and their catechisms and statements of faith were surprisingly similar.

The apostle Paul referred to the Lord's Supper as the “communion” of the body and blood of Christ (I Cor. 10:16) and the sacrament is often referred to by that term. He used the theme of what believers had in *common* in the next chapter as well, in that some were failing to see their unity in the body of Christ and were acting as if the faith only involved personal or family concerns. They were “not discerning” their *common* bond in the *community* that the ecclesia represented.

SIN CAUSES DIVISION

I have always thought it was significant that life in Eden before the fall is not described to us. We could not understand it, so controlled are we by our sin natures. Once we see Adam and

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Eve sinning in Genesis 3, they become understandable to us as sinners. Our sin seems normative to us, where Scripture presents it as something foreign to Creation which God will remove entirely in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

The insight we get into Adam and Eve comes after the fall and it is one of sinful avoidance of responsibility by blame shifting. Sin always causes division (James 4:1ff.). To avoid such division, we must self-consciously pray and submit ourselves to God (vv. 3-4, 7), seek His grace (v. 6), acknowledge and mourn for our sinfulness (vv. 9-10), approach God with pure hearts (v. 8), and obey Him (vv. 11-12). It is not the democratic process of coming together that will solve our divisions, but submission to God and His righteous (i.e., just, for they are the same word) law. In that submission to God we have communion, something in common, and hence community. What Paul was getting at in I Corinthians 11 is that our primary community is the community of faith.

We share much with other believers that we do not have in common (in communion) with those without the body of Christ. Essential to our understanding of who we are is that we self-identify as a Christian, a child of God by grace. We are creatures made in the image of God, which the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. 10) rightly identifies as involving knowledge, righteousness, holiness, and dominion. (Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10, Gen. 1:26-28).

Our *knowledge*, our epistemology, must be based on our worldview that is God-centered because we believe in our total accountability to the Creator and Lord of all. *Righteousness* is not merely our personal moral ethic; it is the justice of God, His requirements for all ethical criteria in personal and public life. This must necessarily include the realm of politics; there is no arbitrary limitation of God's righteousness to His people in Scripture. *Holiness* is being set apart to God and for His purposes. It is a

dedication to service in this life, not a monastic isolation from the world. God's first command associated with His own image was that man should exercise *dominion*. This is not a license to control the creation as if we were its sovereign, but a command to govern as a faithful servant in the recognition that the earth is "the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 24:1). Exercising dominion in terms of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness is how we self-identify as being in the image of God. It must therefore be how we identify ourselves as a community of faith in Christ.

FAITH IN DEMOCRACY?

America's faith in the democratic process is now largely a thing of the past. It is unlikely the process was aboveboard before the recent election. It is now likely the procedures of democracy are as untrustworthy as the promises of politicians and parties. The divisive nature of our political process has placed us in a state of perpetual conflict, as evidenced in the long, concerted attempt to discredit the winner of the 2016 election. Regardless of who takes the oath of office on January 20, 2021, this divisiveness will continue for the foreseeable future. We have no communion, no common thread that holds us together.

I was a teenager in the 1960s. Even with all its revolutionary upheavals, there was still a far greater sense of confidence in many institutions than there is today. There was a much greater trust in the integrity of government then, certainly. It was not the same level of trust of citizens who surrendered their gold for paper in 1933, perhaps, but there was a belief that government could solve our problems, as evidenced by support for L.B. Johnson's reckless "War on Poverty" spending fiasco and the slow opposition to the casualties in the Vietnam "police action" without results.

In the 1960s the cult of science still controlled popular opinion. The previous decade, polio had been conquered and we had committed to visiting the moon



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