

ChalcedonReport

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Words For This Season

Rushdoony Speaks to Our Time Because He Spoke to All Times

A Chalcedon Editorial

R.J. Rushdoony was justly famous for his copious writings on theology, and how it affects our public and private lives.

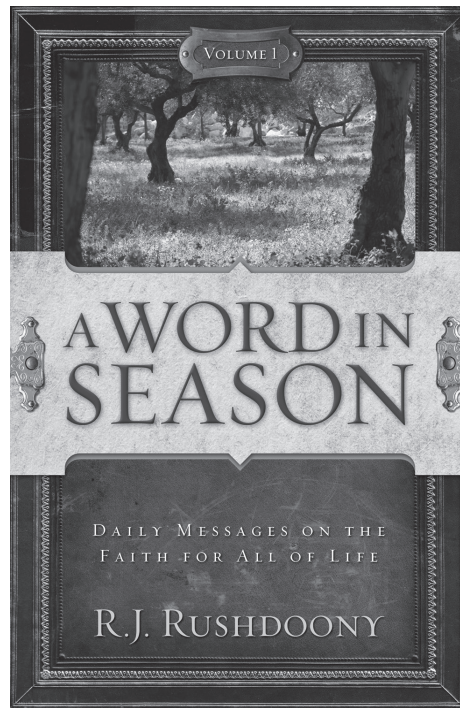
But he could also be short and pithy, as he demonstrated in his series, *A Word in Season*. In fact, you could collect these sayings into a modern Book of Proverbs. Rushdoony's proverbs, like King Solomon's, can and do speak to us day in, day out, on a multitude of subjects pertinent to daily life in all times, all places.

These are timeless. They are as true and as applicable now as when he first wrote them decades ago. You might say he had his finger on the pulse of the future.

So we have assembled a selection of Rushdoony's proverbs for you, all drawn from *A Word in Season*. And we hope you'll want to read the books themselves for more (there are seven of them in the series). You'll find they have a common theme—that politics and governments and cultural fads can't save us, but that our faith in Jesus Christ, and our work of Christian reconstruction in the service of Christ's Kingdom ... will.

Politics and the State

In the wake of the most contentious presidential election in American history, whose outcome is still in doubt as I write this, we are confronted by a massive effort to bring all things under control of a bigger and bigger government. The



dream of a global government is bandied about as it has never been before—this in spite of government's innumerable failures and abuses. What can we learn about this from Rushdoony? Here is a sampling of his thoughts on politics and government.

“Politics was important to Jeremiah, and it should be to us, but politics cannot save us. If the people are apostate and immoral, they will elect men in their own image.”¹

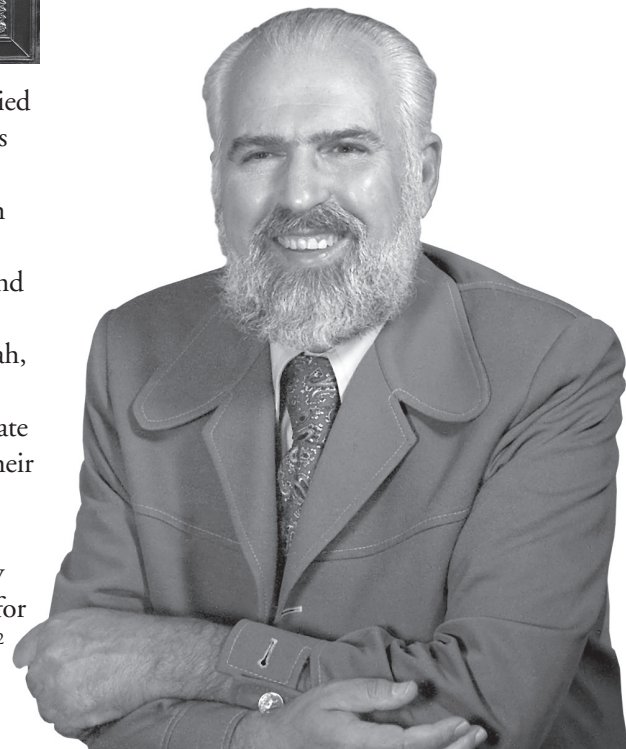
“We have as many hypocrites in government as we do because so many of us voters are hypocrites. We are all for reforming everyone except ourselves.”²

“If we limit the meanings of church and government to an institution and a state, we have not only misused those words but also limited and impoverished our lives. Instead of seeing ourselves as the basic government in human society, we have handed over our lives to the civil government.”³

“There can be no good character in civil government if there is none in the people.”⁴

“Our civil governments are bad because we the people are immoral, and we get the kind of rulers we have earned and deserve. Change begins with us. Only then is it effective.”⁵

“If a people lack discipline and character, will they elect to office or



call to the pulpit and school men of discipline and character?”⁶

“We are again in the age of Caesars, of political saviors. All over the world, politicians proclaim their plans of salvation, and the cornerstone of their building is man.”⁷ We are haunted by the image of the mob calling for the crucifixion of Jesus, proclaiming that they had no king but Caesar. And the proposed worldly “salvations” have only grown more grandiose and less sane since Rushdoony wrote this.

“The Bible makes clear that peace is not a matter of politics but of religion, more specifically, of Jesus Christ. Peace is a product of an inward character; it goes together with righteousness and truth.”⁸

“God’s greatest miracles, and His greatest advances of His work in history, have been done outside both church and state. God has not shared His glory with apostate statism and churchmen; He has never allowed them the luxury of saying that God’s work is dependent on them.”⁹

The Social Issues

Rushdoony understood, as regrettably few observers do, the intimate connection between culture and public policy. He knew we couldn’t debauch our culture and then expect that culture to provide us with wise and decent leaders. Our culture rot has been going on for a long time, and its fruit is readily seen.

“When there is true law and order, then there is also true peace. Abolish law and order, and you abolish peace and create a situation of revolutionary warfare and anarchy. By abandoning Christ as Savior and King, by abandoning His government and peace, we are moving into a world of perpetual warfare.”¹⁰

Rushdoony witnessed the destruction of rioting and civil unrest when he began Chalcedon in the 1960s, and he was far from ignorant about the realities of corrupt law enforcement. Still, he would place the responsibility at the feet of the citizenry.

“The decline in law enforcement reflects the decline in the moral standards of the people.”¹¹ In other words, statist look to government budgets as the answer—“defund the police”—while

Rushdoony looked to salvation and self-government. These two outlooks are nothing new. They are religious manifestations.

“Basically there are two religions, humanism and Christianity; a faith, trust, and reliance on man, or on God.”¹²

Even as Christians, we cannot look to politics for lasting changes in our society. What’s still needed—outside of preaching the gospel—is Christian education to equip believers to apply their faith and engage in the work of reconstruction.

On Christian Reconstruction

Christians ask what they are supposed to do. The answer is godly labor with a clear view to a harvest.

“Above all, plant the seeds, sow the Word, establish truly Christian churches, free and independent Christian schools. Establish a Christian family life, and a godly operation in your farm or business life. The times may look bad for making a start, but there is no harvest without a planting.”¹³

This is seeking the *firstness* of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33).

“When we restore ourselves, our homes, churches, schools, civil government, and all things else to God the King, then God will restore to us what is our due property.”¹⁴

In other words, it has been our works that brought us to this point, and it will be our works that bring us out.

“We are getting what we paid for, and if we want something else, we are going to have to pay for it, in work, sweat, and sacrifice.”¹⁵ When we work for things that do us no good, we waste our labor. This is just as true within the church as it is without.

On the Church

How could several decades of the Religious Right leave us with our present state of affairs? We must take a hard look at the modern church.

“The church can never be the army of the Lord when so many church members are acting like hypersensitive hospital cases, and a pastor’s continual task is smoothing ruffled feathers.”¹⁶

Political Christianity didn’t work, nor did the megachurch method of trying to be “relevant” to the culture.

“Does the church need to change with the times? Not if the church holds the truth; the unchanging truth of God needs to be applied to man’s changing times as the measure or yardstick whereby men and events are to be judged.”¹⁷ One shudders at images of “Clergy for Choice” cheerfully demonstrating for abortion—changing with the times, and how.

“When the church forsakes the faithful ministry of the whole Word of God, it forsakes power, and it loses hearing and hearers.”¹⁸

How many trendy, go-along-to-get-along denominations are now hemorrhaging members left and right? For some reason a lot of people aren’t staying there to see same-sex parodies of marriage, “goddess” worship, and other follies.

On Pietism

Then there were churches who took an opposite approach. Starting in the 19th century, some Christian denominations took a turn toward non-involvement in many areas of life. Rushdoony constantly warned against this kind of pietism.

“There is neither growth, nor peace, nor happiness in solitude. By trying to escape from responsibility to God and to man, they are also escaping from life itself, because life is responsibility.”¹⁹

After all, shouldn’t our faith push us forward? Can a *monk* truly influence society? Doesn’t God want us to invade history rather than escape from it?

“When the faith is more than a possession but a fire in our being that possesses us, we are governed by it. It commands and compels us as nothing else can, because we are in the hands and power of the living Lord.”²⁰

For some, they simply don’t have the stomach for the work, and pietism becomes a way for them to feel they are doing God a service. Still others lack the fortitude to complete the work.

“I find a common failing: people start a good work, and because it does

not succeed in producing the desired result overnight or at least very quickly, they give up, they quit, they turn back after having made a good beginning.”²¹

Who needs a devil when we’re so adept at undermining our own efforts?

On Freedom and Socialism

Since modern life is so politicized, it becomes necessary to properly define our terms so we can be clear about how we achieve our goals. We can decry socialism, but do we understand the sacrifice required for liberty?

Rushdoony writes, “Freedom in the Biblical sense is always at a price; it is a costly gift, and it requires great things of us.”²²

So, why do Christians look to politicians for freedom? At the most, a political party is only a stopgap measure which only buys time to establish more political seats. Is this *modus operandi* any different than the statists on the other side of the aisle?

“The social planners want a society totally organized by man and his central planning. They believe that unless a bureaucrat manages the world and its economy, everything will fall apart.”²³

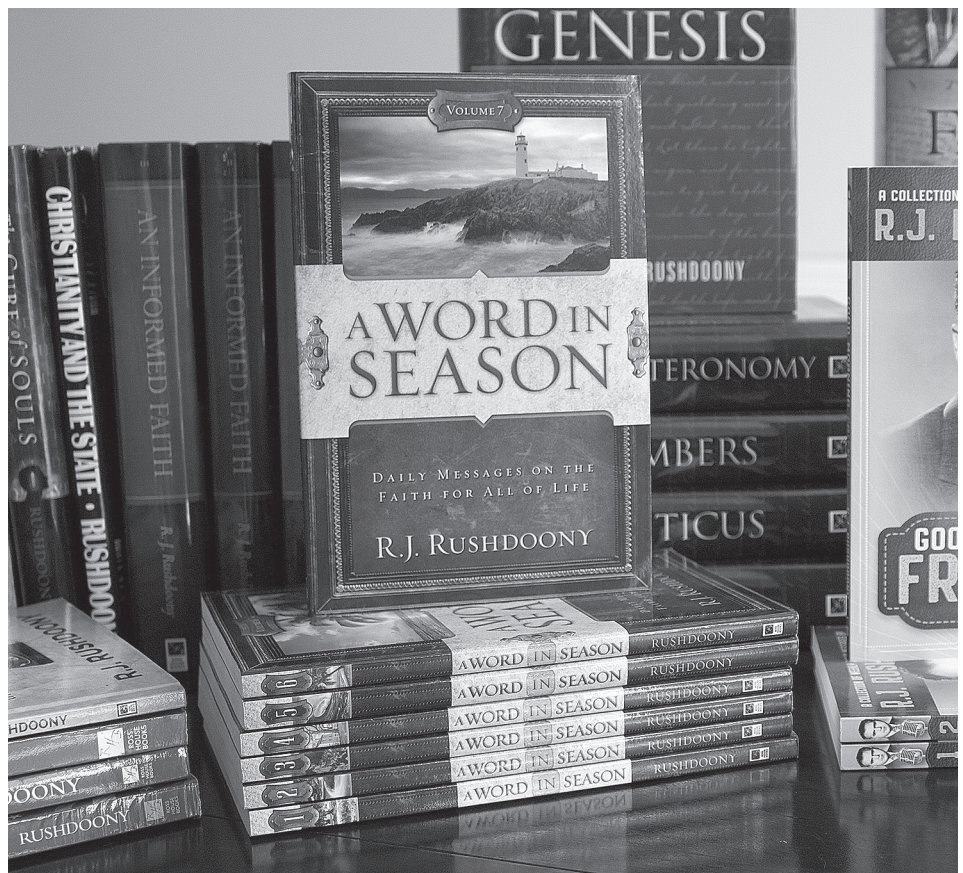
In other words, there is a price you pay for centralization because such a system is easily subverted. Rushdoony makes this plain.

“When men trust in controls rather than freedom, they will get more controls unto slavery and less freedom.”²⁴ That has never been more obvious than it is now: in the midst of a worldwide panic over the COVID-19 virus, statist mayors and governors are handing down new “mandates” day by day. In the name of making us “safe,” they restrict our freedoms.

If not the state, then what will create man’s great society? Should we look to the organized church who after decades of political involvement has so little to show for it?

And with the church struggling to influence the culture, to what institution should we look? Although he was labeled a political theocrat, Rushdoony saw the Christian family as the key to liberty.

“No system devised by man or the



If Christian Reconstruction had a “devotional series,” this would be it!

state can ever replace the family in its efficiency and success in creating social stability and strength while supporting and educating virtually all the children of the land.”²⁵

Can you see why Christian education is still the great work of our time? Whether adult or child, Christians must be equipped for godly service. Otherwise, we will sink along with those who have no faith in God.

On Worry and Fear

“Our age is riddled with tension and is ulcer-ridden because our world is too greatly absorbed with its problems and too little absorbed with the God who alone can govern all things.”²⁶

We are witnessing this firsthand as fear and anxiety are paralyzing both believer and non-believer alike. And when we do pray, we ask amiss.

“The point of too much of our prayer is that we want things and God to change to please us, not we ourselves changed to please God.”²⁷

We are the problem, and the application of God’s Word is the

solution. Before we pray, there is nothing greater that we can do. After we pray, there is much that we can do, and our full service is the sole meaning of the Christian life.

“We can never in this life protect ourselves fully against men, because we ourselves are men. Taking necessary precautions against sin and folly is secondary. What we need most to do is to serve God with all our heart, mind, and being.”²⁸

And we can do this, Rushdoony notes, because we serve a sovereign God who controls all things. He writes, “I must at all times recognize that, while I do not know what the future will bring, I do know who is bringing it. It is the Lord.”²⁹

History has seen darker times than ours, but God is bigger than history, and that’s more than enough reason for hope. May we live in this realization.

“When the lights go out all over the world, when history seems headed only into a dead end and total disaster, God brings forth light.”³⁰

Conspiracy Thinking

As already noted, Rushdoony placed the onus on us as both God's people as well as citizens, but we don't see how our national system reflects our own way of living. Take, for example, economics.

"Today our worldwide economic policy seems simply this: eat up the future. Use up the natural resources carelessly; pile up debt upon debt and let tomorrow's world worry about it; live it up now and save nothing for tomorrow. As a nation, we are eating up the future at an increasingly rapid rate."³¹

We treat our own lives—as well as the Kingdom of God—much the same as the economic policies of modern nations. We spend. We indebt ourselves, and thereby forsake the future by furnishing the present.

Is it any wonder then that we have the results we do despite our political efforts? Is it a mystery that we have enabled such an entitled generation?

"How long can any country last if it penalizes good and subsidizes evil? How can a country survive if it places a tax on work and gives that money to the lazy and the improvident? Such a country will get exactly what it promotes."³²

Yet, for some, they cannot see their own error, and so they direct blame on a cabal of conspirators out to undermine national sovereignty, end Christianity, and create a New World Order.

Some of this is true. There are globalists. There are financiers who hold the purse strings of nations. There are agendas looking to regulate and tax on an international scale, but the explosion of conspiracy research during the past two decades has only muddied the waters and even Christians are caught up in the speculation. Conspiracy theorists often frustrated Rushdoony.

"Many misguided people spend time and money studying evil, documenting conspiracies, endlessly probing 'the depths of Satan.' They cease to become useful members of society: they are simply experts on evil. They often believe more in the power of evil than in the power of God."³³

As a Calvinist, Rushdoony knew who controlled history, and therefore, he

could rest easy about the future and give no fear to any conspirator.

"The future is not in the hands of the planners but in the hands of God, and each new day, month, and year only serve to unfold God's purpose and to frustrate the ambitions of ungodly men."³⁴

In Conclusion

Over his long career, few matters escaped Rushdoony's attention, and his desire to read broadly was due to his interest in seeing how God's Word applied to all areas of life. This was the model he set for us.

For example, even with subjects such as environmentalism, Rushdoony was no novice. He felt the Bible spoke plainly about such matters, and he saw the natural order as part of man's dominion calling.

"Man must use the earth as a wise steward under God, as a trustee. This means neither a wasteful exploitation nor a sterile preservation of things as they are."³⁵

Pick any subject, and his argument would've been similar. The responsibility is ours, and that responsibility we refer to as dominion, which is why the mission of Christian Reconstruction is still so imperative.

Granted, there are many who will still not hear our message, but the troubles of our times are working to open the ears of more Christians who are looking for solutions.

"In a world with so many ready to hear, why waste words on the willfully deaf?"³⁶

We need gospel preaching, but we need gospel living as well. As Rushdoony wrote, "Our problem today is not a lack of people speaking out, but a lack of people with faith, bringing forth the fruit of faith."³⁷

And this gospel of the Kingdom is only good news to some. For others, who find themselves in opposition to King Jesus, the gospel is an announcement that all power in heaven and earth is given to Christ who is both fully God and fully man.

Since Christ came in history, He sets a limit upon all human authority, and as

King of Kings, He will ensure the victory of His Kingdom in history. Let this be the focus of our holiday celebration!

"The birth of our Lord is bad news for the mighty ones of a fallen and apostate world. It is the reminder of God's unceasing warfare against all sin and evil, and the certainty of His victory."³⁸

1. R.J. Rushdoony, *A Word in Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life*, Vol. 1 (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2010), p. 26.

2. R.J. Rushdoony, *A Word in Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life*, Vol. 2 (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2011), p. 43.

3. Vol. 2, p. 110.

4. R.J. Rushdoony, *A Word in Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life*, Vol. 4 (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2012), p. 97.

5. R.J. Rushdoony, *A Word in Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life*, Vol. 3 (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2011), p. 113.

6. Vol. 2, p. 116.

7. Vol. 3, p. 53.

8. Vol. 2, p. 132.

9. Vol. 2, p. 21.

10. Vol. 2, p. 26.

11. Vol. 3, p. 131.

12. Vol. 3, p. 41.

13. Vol. 2, p. 18.

14. Vol. 3, p. 22.

15. Vol. 1, p. 86.

16. Vol. 2, p. 119.

17. Vol. 2, p. 127.

18. Vol. 2, p. 130.

19. Vol. 1, p. 63.

20. Vol. 2, p. 11.

21. Vol. 4, p. 47.

22. Vol. 1, p. 128.

23. Vol. 2, p. 51.

24. Vol. 3, p. 20.

25. Vol. 2, p. 55.

26. Vol. 2, p. 16.

27. Vol. 2, p. 105.

28. Vol. 3, p. 38.

29. Vol. 2, p. 143.

30. Vol. 2, p. 148.

31. Vol. 2, p. 72.

32. Vol. 2, p. 82.

33. Vol. 1, p. 67.

34. Vol. 2, p. 136.

35. Vol. 4, p. 124.

36. Vol. 1, p. 61.

37. Vol. 1, p. 30.

38. Vol. 4, p. 139.