

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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## THE MIND AT WAR

*Saving Private Ryan* is one of the most realistic (and disturbing) war movies I have ever seen. Even though I spent a tour of duty in Vietnam as an infantryman and saw combat on a number of occasions—my experience was nothing like the d-day beach scene that was graphically depicted in *Saving Private Ryan*. Some movies glorify war—but this movie does not. War is not pretty and it is certainly not fun and exciting. The Bible depicts the Christian life as one of warfare. (Note how the Apostle Paul repeatedly stresses this – Eph. 6:11-18; I Tim. 1:18; II Tim 2:3-5; 4:7). The Scriptures *never* give the impression that the Christian life is fun and exciting. Many Evangelical churches, however, give people the exact opposite impression—becoming a Christian is fun and exciting—going to church is like a trip to Disneyland! Words that have meaning *only* in their Biblical context—*joy*, *blessing* are suddenly appropriated to mean fun, and happy. But, as we are seeing, it doesn't stop with this. Terms like *God*, *spirituality*, *gospel*, *grace*, *love*, and even *Jesus* are empty apart from biblical content. Take, for example, Judy Collins's explanation of John Newton's hymn, *Amazing Grace*. Collins informs us, "*Amazing Grace* is a song about letting go, bottoming out, seeing the light, turning it over, trusting the universe, breathing in, breathing out, going with the flow; timing is everything, trust your instincts, don't push the river, ease on down the road, get on your knees, let your guard down, drop your defenses, lighten up . . ." <sup>11</sup> Oh, really? I always thought Newton was writing about the nature of salvation. But then again, as we are repeatedly told, who is to say that the original meaning is the only legitimate one? We live in a culture that determines meaning individually. Morality, like religion, is a matter of personal preference. What I want and like is not only true (for me) but is also right (for me). That different people want and choose differently means that truth is always relative. No one has the right to say that my choices are wrong. What we are witnessing in society is the elevation of tolerance as *the* cardinal virtue. Gene Edward Veith describes it this way. "Under the post-modernist way of thinking, the principle of cultural diversity means that every like-minded group constitutes a culture that must be considered as good as any other culture. The postmodernist sins are 'being judgmental,' 'being narrow-minded,' 'thinking that you have the only truth,' and 'trying to enforce your values on anyone else.' Those who question the postmodernist dogma that 'there are no absolutes' are excluded from the canons of tolerance. The only wrong idea is to believe in truth; the only sin is to believe in sin."<sup>2</sup> Our text calls upon every Christian (especially pastors) to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ—a task made doubly difficult by the present condition—especially as it pertains to the Evangelical church. Edmund Clowney notes, "Today the people who still think it worthwhile to advise preachers demand preaching that is relevant and relational. The relations they are concerned about, however, are not their relations to God, but to their spouses, their children, and possibly their neighbors. When they ask for relevance they often mean sermons to support their personal goals or party prejudices. Let the preacher tell them how to manage their time, or perhaps their investments."<sup>3</sup> Clowney is not describing a condition that is outside the Evangelical church—sadly, he is describing the what passes for preaching in many Evangelical churches. Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Community Church in Mission Viejo, CA recently hosted a four-day conference on "How to Build a Church." Warren is the key figure in what is now known as the "Saddleback Strategy." He encourages pastors to focus on issues such as time management because this makes preaching "more practical". Warren says we need to illustrate biblical passages "with examples and apply them to real life. Simply interpreting and explaining the Scriptures no longer

works.” So much for proclaiming the Gospel and being committed to the clarity and availability of Holy Scripture. Warren Concludes, “Sermons that teach people how to live will never lack an audience”. Thus, Jesus is a new Moses, our moral example who tells us how to live. Jesus, the Savior of sinners, who died for all those times when we did not and could not live the right way, may not be relevant to this group. The shepherds need new shepherds.<sup>4</sup> Paul’s admonition in our text requires us first of all to be people who honor God in their thinking. There has to be, as D.A. Carson put it, “A God-given determination to dethrone all competing systems of thought and bring them into captivity to the gospel...and that requires constant, thoughtful, Bible reading, theological reflection, interaction with Christian thinkers from the past, humble assessment of the currents of our age and courageous determination not to become their slave.”<sup>5</sup>

## I. THE SOLDIER OF CHRIST

Paul uses a military metaphor—we are engaged in a battle. The Christian life is repeatedly depicted in Scripture in terms of warfare (Eph. 6:10-18; I Tim. 1:18; II Tim 2:3-4; 4:7 and II Cor. 6:7). This is a warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We wage warfare against evil and error—especially against the enemies of truth who seek to overthrow the Gospel of Christ.

A. The Soldier’s Weapons The way Paul describes this is significant. First of all he emphatically declares that our weapons are *not* of this world, i.e., after the manner of the flesh. “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. Not only do such weapons fail to make an impression on the strongholds of Satan, but a secularized Church is a Church which, having adopted the standards of the world, has ceased to fight and is herself overshadowed by the posers of darkness.”<sup>6</sup> The Christian’s weapons are *divinely powerful*. What does this refer to? Charismatics like to claim that this refers to the extra-ordinary gifts (speaking in tongues, special revelation, inspired prophecies). Notice, however, that these weapons are designed to demolish strongholds (lit. pull down fortresses). This is further described as demolishing *arguments*—in other words the activity that is described here *challenges* our opponents’ opposition to the Gospel and God’s Christ. I contend then that what Paul has in mind is not spiritual gifts (which are designed to edify the body) but the Gospel of Christ crucified—this is the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:18-21).

B. The Soldier’s Tactics *Casting down imagination* refers to bringing to nought all lofty notions that oppose (lit. are raised up like ramparts against a fort) the knowledge of God. Paul is dealing with the realm of the human will and intellect. Hence, it is that our warfare is aimed at casting down *reasoning* (LOGISMOI—lit. rationalization of the autonomous man). The strongholds, as Hughes points out, are what the unbelieving mind seeks to fortify itself against the truths of human depravity and divine grace, and at the casting down also of every proud bulwark raised high against the knowledge of God. This metaphor emphasizes the defiant and mutinous nature of sin: Sinful man does not wish to know God; he wishes himself to be the self-sufficient centre of his universe. The knowledge of God is available to him, indeed he cannot escape from it: It is a knowledge which is constitutional to him, for he himself is God’s creature, made, moreover, in the image of his Creator; it is a knowledge which the whole created order clearly and ceaselessly proclaims, witnessing as it does to the eternal power and godhead of the Creator (cf. Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:19f); and it is a knowledge livingly and graciously revealed in Christ Jesus, preserved in Holy Scripture, and presented in the preaching of the gospel (cf. 4:6).

But sinful man rebels against this knowledge of God. He holds down the truth in unrighteousness. Knowing God, he refuses to glorify Him as God. His senseless heart is darkened, so that, though professing himself to be wise, he becomes a fool.<sup>7</sup> “These strongholds of sin,” says Thomas Goodwin, “are reasonings in the understanding, for they especially oppose the knowledge of God, and therefore the ammunition within these holds must needs be reasonings and acts of knowledge. These adversaries are matched and fitted with the same kind of weapons as those who come against them are provided with, for as the weapons of our warfare are spiritual, spiritual wisdom out of the word of God and the

knowledge of God, so the inhabitants and possessors of these strongholds are reasonings of carnal wisdom, and knowledge opposite thereunto.”<sup>8</sup>

C. The Soldier's Duty Not only are the exalted reasonings of the autonomous man pulled down, but the Christian must likewise seek to bring every thought captive unto the obedience of Christ. When this happens, the truth of the Gospel is established, the rebellion of the autonomous man is quelled, and Christ is honored as Lord of all. Heed the wise words of Calvin, “In my view, having just spoken of the conflict of spiritual arms with the hindrances that oppose Christ's Gospel, he now deals with the ordinary process of preparation by which men are to be brought into obedience to Him. For as long as we rest content with our own experiences and are wise in our own eyes, we are far away from any approach to the doctrine of Christ. Thus we have first to accept that he who would be wise must first become a fool, that is, we must give up our understanding and renounce the wisdom of the flesh and offer to Christ empty minds that He may fill them. We should notice the expression he uses, ‘bringing every thought into captivity’, which is to say that the liberty of the human mind is to be restrained and bridled so that it will seek no wisdom outside the doctrine of Christ, and the only way for its boldness to be restrained is for it to be made captive.”<sup>9</sup> Harry Blamires offers some helpful suggestions.

1. Does this advice or teaching recognize that God is our Father and Creator to whom we owe obedience, or does it presuppose that the individual is an autonomous being subject to no such authority?
2. Does this advice or teaching recognize that the human being has an eternal destiny and derives his or her personal significance and value from God himself, or does it presuppose that the individual has an earthly life only and can define his or her full worth at the limitedly human level?
3. Does this advice or teaching recognize a code of morality based on absolute values, or does it presuppose that all morality is relative and that in self-expression we can find our own moral moorings?
4. Does this advice or teaching allow that love of God and of others will demand self-conquest and self-sacrifice, or does it give primacy to ideals of self-realization in personal development?
5. Does this advice or teaching allow for the need for penitence, forgiveness, and restitution to others, or does it tend to play down any sense of guilt and to explain all difficulties in terms of external causes?<sup>10</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** The kind of preaching that I mentioned in the introduction *cannot* equip people for the task of apologetics. What will happen when apologetics are deemed unnecessary? Without a vital apologetic we may find ourselves so captivated by our surrounding culture that we end up on the wrong side of the battle without realizing it. Without a vital apologetic another problem will certainly arise, namely *fear*. This will take form in two ways. Either our fear will drive us into a *monastic* mentality in which we will seek to withdraw from the world into our own little world—this type of *isolationism* or tribalism does not honor God. Second, and this may actually be worse, our fear will cause us to adjust our faith in the face of opposition so that it becomes less and less of a threat to those who oppose the biblical Gospel. This kind of *accommodationism* is a constant threat we face. How would you respond to the following charges, the kind that the world repeatedly makes?

1. The Christian faith is the enemy of pleasure, enjoyment, and fulfillment. It stands for inhibition, prohibition, insecurity, and self-righteousness.
2. The Christian faith is the enemy of democracy and civility. Conservative Christians want political power to create a theocracy with places in leadership only for those who agree with them.
3. The Christian faith is the enemy of women. From the early history of the church, leaders established the inferior status of women in church and society and have resisted attempts to reform ever since.
4. The Christian faith is the enemy of gay people, as can be seen in the bumper sticker of a few years ago, “Kill a gay for Jesus.”

5. The Christian faith is the enemy of cultural diversity; it is an ethnocentric moral police force.
6. The Christian faith is the enemy of non-white races. This has been evident from a theological defense of race-based slavery to the starting of Christian schools as a way to avoid the integration of the public school system.
7. The Christian faith is the enemy of the environment. The biblical notion of dominion over the earth is at the root of our abuse of the natural world.
8. The Christian faith is the enemy of the arts. Christians have scorned the world of the arts as either satanic or trivial and have produced nothing of artistic value for a hundred fifty years.
9. The Christian faith is the enemy of science, education, and the advance of knowledge.
10. The Christian faith is the enemy of economic justice. It is a good religion for the fat cats who can interpret the Bible to legitimize their wealth and privilege.

Dick Keyes, in citing these writes, “If you are a Christian, perhaps you can feel the polarizing force working on you as you read the ten charges. The chameleon voice speaks and says, “Well, I guess there is a lot of truth there. Maybe we must just apologize for past wrongs and avoid offending the consensus in the future.” The timid musk-ox voice then tells you, “Keep a low profile. Don’t risk getting caught in any divisive discussions like that.” But the more defiant musk-ox voice might say, “Those claims are ridiculous. I can prove to anybody how stupid they are!” All these responses deny our identity as salt and light. A Christian apologetic at the end of the twentieth century must not hide from issues. It must engage them not just to answer the attacks, but also to give challenges back in God’s name and in his love. If no such response is made, that failure will lead to both accommodation and tribalism.”<sup>11</sup>

If we are to be found faithful, we *must* make every effort to be good soldiers of the cross. We simply cannot sit in our comfortable pews and expect that our first priority in life is having our felt-needs met—church should have more of a boot-camp atmosphere—as it is, many churches resemble a Saturday picnic outing with games and such. If we are going to follow Paul’s admonition in II Cor. 10:3-6 we are going to first have to change our minds (repent) of our worldly ways of doing church. We are going to have to be about the serious business of being discerning and thoughtful Christians. In his book *The Struggle for Men’s Hearts and Minds*, Charles Colson pictures the church today as “a church which increasingly accommodates secular values.” He is speaking of a church that cannot (or will not) separate between those values which are taught in the Scriptures and those which are taught in the world. Integration by the accommodation of truth to error has brought about this condition. Such integration is the very opposite of the discriminating action of persons with discernment. Colson’s later admonition is to the point: “*We must discern the false values of this world—and reject them*” (emphasis his).<sup>12</sup> There is a very real war taking place and as a Christian you are, like it or not, on the front line. What kind of soldier are you? You have your orders. They are very clear. Now may God grant you grace and resolve to carry them out.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> As cited in *World* (Oct. 30, 1999), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> G. E. Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Crossways, 1994), p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> E. P. Clowney, “Preaching the Word of the Lord: Cornelius VanTil, V.D.M.,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* (Vol. XLVI, No. 2, fall 1984), p. 243.

<sup>4</sup> As cited by Michael Horton in *The Horse’s Mouth* (July, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Zondervan, 1996), p. 484

<sup>6</sup> P.E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1962), p. 350.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 352

<sup>8</sup> *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, X (rpt. Tanski, 1996), p. 378.

<sup>9</sup> *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* X (rpt. Eerdmans, 1973), p. 130.

<sup>10</sup> Harry Blamires, *Recovering the Christian Mind: Meeting the Challenge of Secularism* (IVP, 1988), p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> D. Keyes, *Chameleon Christianity: Moving Beyond Safety and Conformity* (Baker, 1999), p. 66.

<sup>12</sup> As cited in Jay Adams, *A Call to Discernment: Distinguishing Truth From Error in Today’s Church* (Harvest House, 1987), p. 47. I should mention, that in one regard, Colson has not been consistent. He was one of the Evangelicals who was chiefly responsible for the *Evangelical and Catholics Together* accord—a document that *accommodated* the Roman Catholics by omitting the little word *alone* when the subject of justification by faith was discussed. cf. R.C. Sproul *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Baker, 1995), pp. 35-51 for extended discussion.