

THE METHODS OF MADNESS

by Ray C. Stedman

In our present series we are facing together the truly relevant problem of how a Christian should react to the social ills and injustices of our day. I suppose there has never been a time when these disorders of society were more widespread. They press upon us every way we turn and we cannot escape them. We need therefore to find an answer to these from the Scripture and we are doing so in the light of Second Corinthians, Chapter 10, introduced in Verses 3 and 4.

For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. {2 Cor 10:3-4 RSV}

In this passage, as we have previously seen, two things are immediately evident:

1. One is that we cannot and we must not ignore these problems. "We live in the world," says the Apostle Paul. We must not try to evade them or ignore them. We must not try to run away from life. It is basically unChristian to run away from the problems of life, to seek a shelter where we can live out our years without encountering the difficulties around us.

This was not the case with Jesus Christ. He lived square in the middle of life. He lived life up to the hilt and associated with those afflicted with grievous problems, emotionally, physically, and in every other way. This is also where the Christian must live. We live in the world. We must not adopt a head-in-the-sand attitude. These bodily ills concern us, or they ought to. We remember the words in the Gospels, concerning the Lord Jesus, that he looked upon the multitudes with compassion. He saw them "as sheep not having a shepherd" {cf, Matt 9:36}, wandering about without help or guidance in the midst of perplexing and confusing situations which they did not understand, being destroyed because of ignorance. But since he possessed the light and the truth he longed to convey it to them. This must also be the attitude of the Christian in these matters.

2. Second, in this brief paragraph, it is apparent that we do not and must not attack these social problems in the way the world does. Says the apostle, "We live in the world but the weapons of our warfare are not worldly." We do not face life the same way. We fight in another dimension, and yet our fighting is not weak; it is powerful. It wins, it succeeds, it is mighty. In a previous study we noted in a general way something of the nature of these problems in individual and social life. They are what Paul calls *strongholds*, i.e., places and situations where evil is entrenched, where it cannot be dislodged easily, it is powerfully defended. There are many such in our day. They abound around us on every side. Many have become issues which the world is struggling vainly to alleviate, but without success.

But we have not yet learned enough about these problems, so I invite you to look further at Verse 5. The apostle says,

We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." {2 Cor 10:5 RSV}

There are two things revealed here:

- First, there is the source of the enemy's strength; and,
- Second, there is the nature of the Christian's attack.

Today we shall concern ourselves only with the first of these two, the source of the enemy's strength.

One of the chief rules of warfare is, know your enemy. You can never be successful as a soldier if you do not know something of the tactics of the enemy. This is true in military conflict and it is true in spiritual warfare as well. The second rule of warfare is, know your weapons. Know what you have to meet the enemy with, and know how to use them. Right here, of course, is why the church has been so weak. It is because it has neglected both of these areas. It has not understood its enemy, and it has not understood its own weapons. These are both revealed in this one verse of Scripture, and we must take time to look at them carefully and understand what they mean.

Let us come to grips with the first issue:

What makes these strongholds so strong? From whence does the enemy derive the strength that enables him to remain entrenched in human society? Why is it so difficult to eradicate these pockets of evil in our social structures? Why do they defy the attempts made by sincere and earnest men and women, such as are recorded in our daily newspapers week after week, to eliminate or control these problems? Why are they so hard?

What we are asking, in terms of our own day, is essentially this: Why is drug traffic so hard to dislodge and eliminate among young people? Why do they seem to resist such efforts? Why can't they see how terrible are the effects of becoming involved with LSD, marijuana, and other drugs available today? And we are also asking, what makes student unrest so unmanageable? Why are the campuses so constantly in turmoil these days? Why is it that the application of good, sound, commonsense principles does not seem to solve the situation? Why is it that the parties involved cannot sit down and talk out their differences amicably and helpfully? Why does it all seem to suddenly explode in riot and demonstration and violence?

We are also asking: Why are race problems so explosive? Here is another area where violence seems to tremble beneath the surface of almost every meeting that is called to try to discuss these problems. Why is this? We must ask these deep questions if we are going to understand the enemy we attack. And we must attack these; we are Christians, living in the world. The world is the way it is because of certain factors at loose in society, which are made clear by the Word of God. If you think the Bible has no relevancy to life, you have badly misjudged its character. It deals precisely with life. It is the book made to go with life, and therefore it offers to us the only workable solutions to these problems.

What we are asking, among other questions, is: What makes Communism so attractive to many people today? Despite its obvious record of enslavement, murder, rape, and pillage, what makes this philosophy so attractive to so many minds, to so many educated, intelligent minds? What is the appeal of these things? Where does it get its strength? Also, why does materialism and humanism take such a deadly toll of despair, depression, and suicide in our own day, especially among young people?

Did you know that last year over 10,000 students in our universities in America took their own lives? That is a far worse toll than the Vietnam war takes. Why is this? Why are these things so strong? From whence do they derive such strength, such defiant persistence, such clinging tenacity?

The answer lies in the two elements which Paul describes for us in Verse 5. These are always present in any problem where evil is at work, whether it is in the individual life or the social life. Though the Bible makes its appeal largely to the individual, we must remember that society is nothing but a collection of individuals. Therefore these things have direct relevance also to social areas.

What are these two elements? Here are the pillars of strength of evil, revealed to us: First, says the apostle, they are "arguments." In the Greek it is *logismos*, which means "reasonings." Second, their strength derives from "every proud obstacle." Pride, in other words. Literally, it is "every high thing which exalts itself," i.e., every point of pride which expresses itself in conceit or self-praise, self-exaltation, and whose final ultimate thrust is, as Paul puts it, "against the knowledge of God." That is where evil derives its strength. It is from these two things: reasonings and the independent pride which insists that man does not need God. These are the pillars from which evil derives its ultimate strength.

You will note immediately that there is a relationship between these two things. Reasonings, "arguments," are the outward expression of the inward attitude of self-sufficient pride. This is why social problems are so

impervious to the weapons the world uses. Why is it that men cannot seem to get anywhere in solving these problems by meetings, discussions, committee reports, investigations, and all the other things? It is because the weapons they are using are infected with the same disease they are trying to cure! The ones who are attempting to solve these problems are doing so with minds and hearts already twisted and affected by the very evil they are trying to get at.

This is what men do not see. They think that an earnest desire is all that it takes, but they do not understand that they, themselves, are affected by the very same evils. Even Christians, obviously, can approach problems in the same way. Whenever Christians approach these problems with the world's weapons they display the same weakness.

Let us take a closer look at these points of strength from which evil derives its power and its persistence:

First, there are these reasonings, these arguments. Have you noticed in reading history or in studying life around you, that every movement in society which eventually becomes a threat, i.e., an attack upon humanity, always originates (if you can get back to the beginning of it) as an emotional outburst? It never begins with someone coolly sitting down and planning to start a movement. It always begins with some emotional reaction. Then, having taken that form at the beginning, it is soon apparent that, in order to continue the movement and expand it, it will be necessary to justify it. It needs to be explained and defended. It calls therefore for the activity of writers and speakers who can support the cause with arguments.

When a movement begins as an emotional outburst it is rather simple to control. At that early stage of any movement it can be easily handled. Those involved can usually sit down with others and work out things, and, as emotions cool, wiser heads prevail. This happens all the time. There are incipient movements around us that are being arrested at their very start by such processes. But when a movement passes to the second stage and begins to be supported and buttressed by arguments, by reasoned defenses and explanations in justification of these things, from that moment it begins to take on strength and is difficult to overthrow.

You who know your Bible will notice that is the pattern that took place in the Garden of Eden. Here stands Eve before the luscious, desirable fruit. It has made its appeal to her senses and to everything in her; it has aroused her desire. As she stands there looking at the fruit she wants to have it. There has been awakened an urge, an emotional reaction within her. The story goes on to reveal the next stage. As she looks at this tantalizing fruit there before her, she begins to outline in her mind the first chapter of a book in defense of eating the fruit. She sees that "it is good for food, it is a delight to the eyes, and it is desirable to make one wise," {cf, Gen 3:6}. There are the chapters of the book that she ultimately wrote and presented to her husband (speaking figuratively, of course) in which she convinced him that eating was the right thing to do.

This is exactly what happens today. A movement begins -- certain conditions create it -- and there is an emotional reaction to it. Then, instead of calming down so that the problems can be worked out, somebody defends that action. Someone writes out an argument for it, or speaks about it, and justifies it. Soon the movement spreads and it is then very difficult to overthrow. It has derived strength from what Paul speaks of here as "reasonings."

But now we must look at this more closely, and we must look at it as Christians. We must understand what these reasonings are, for they are, essentially, a tribute to the primacy of the mind, the intelligence, in man. What distinguishes man from the animals is that he refuses to have his mind bypassed. Animals react emotionally; they follow urges, the instincts of their own kind. When an animal acts he is not troubled by conscience. He does not toss and turn all night in his sleep because of what he did during the day -- you can check them and see.

Men would react the same way if it were not for the mind, that strange faculty of wanting everything to be logical, reasonable, justifiable. Thus it is the mind that prompts the conscience. The mind cannot be bypassed; it must come into play. But when it is asked to defend something that is not right (i.e., is not in line with reality), then these reasonings become false reasonings. They become what we call rationalizations. They are simply an expedient that the mind resorts to, to make an action that has already occurred appear to be reasonable.

That is what Paul is referring to here. This is where evil derives its strength. It produces specious and plausible sounding arguments which make their ultimate appeal to man's self-sufficiency, his unlimited capabilities (as he sees himself), his lack of any need for God, and which are basically against the knowledge of God. These things appeal to man's independence, so logically and compellingly, that millions are deceived by them and follow them. That is why evil is so deeply entrenched in society.

Let us go a step further: In the full revelation of Scripture it is made clear from whence these reasonings come, the ultimate source of them. Without going into this in any detail I want to pinpoint them for you. The Apostle Paul calls these "doctrines of demons." He says they arise from "seducing spirits," spirits at work, using the minds of men as their instruments, to present to humanity what are really lies. They are reasonable-sounding lies, plausible lies, but they are actually lies, they are not truths. They are false, seductive, they lead people astray. They do not educate the mind toward truth but toward error.

When you look for the demonic, do not merely look at the occult, at the realm of outright demonic possession, etc. These "wicked spirits in high places" which Paul mentions in Ephesians 6 are our real enemies. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood" {Eph 6:12 KJV}, he says, but we wrestle against these who are working through the minds and thinking of men. How else can you explain the evil that keeps cropping up in human society? Why is it that universities, dedicated to the pursuit of truth, should become in many cases the places where evil is most deep-seated and most powerfully disseminated? How else can you account for this, except that Paul has correctly analyzed the situation and that these ideas come from demonic spirits working through the minds of men, teaching wrong ideas in a very logical and plausible manner.

Try that formula out on life and see if it does not fit. Every movement has its reasonings to support it -- the good as well as the bad, the true as well as the false. Each has its philosophy, its defenders, its explainers, its theologians, if you like, who are constantly justifying and explaining why things happen. But you can tell the difference between the good and the bad, between truth and error, when you see what is at the heart of it, what is the thrust of it, what is behind it which men are trying to bring out.

In the good, it is always "the knowledge of God," the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus himself said, "No man can know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him," {cf, Matt 11:27}. Think of that claim! No man can know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. If that is true then the knowledge of God is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This is why he said in his great prayer in John 17, "This is life eternal, that men may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent," {cf, John 17:3}. That is what the knowledge of God is: it is knowing the Son of God, for it is through him that we know the Father.

Then, look at the heart of any philosophy, at its arguments and reasonings: It may not even mention God, but does it exalt man? That is the point. If it is lifting up man as something high and great, something that exalts itself, praises itself, that is the test. When you see what lies behind these things, then you can tell whether it is a doctrine of demons or the truth as it is in Jesus.

Look at what is behind the arguments for drugs, for instance. What do you read today, what are young people hearing about drugs? Well, they are told that, in experiencing drugs, there is a promise of color, meaning, excitement, and fulfillment in life. But it is all without God. It is a promise of finding fulfillment without any reference whatsoever to the only One who can produce this in human life. It ignores God, sets him aside. Oh, they talk about God, but not God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ. Therefore this whole movement is clearly demonic, a doctrine of demons, leading men not into freedom and liberty but into enslavement, where their minds and hearts are being destroyed. Our mental institutions are now being filled with the most pathetic kind of young people who have been deluded into an experiment with drugs, and their minds are being permanently destroyed.

What lies behind race prejudice, whether it be white or black? It is becoming very apparent that there are as many black racists as there are white, proportionately. What lies behind that? You can see clearly it is a desire for pride, for domination over others, for the exaltation of "my group" as opposed to someone else's group. Racism is always this, and, therefore, it is clearly a doctrine of demons. These reasonings, no matter how

plausible the arguments may sound in support of them, are revealed at their heart as being "high things" exalting themselves against the knowledge of God.

What is behind student unrest, violence, and riots, in our day? There is a degree of legitimate protest, granted. But when it moves in the realm of violence, when it becomes a mob, smashing and burning and looting and defying authority, it reveals itself to be motivated by a love of power, pride of will, loving to pit will against will, glorying in defiance of authority.

Against this, says the apostle, we are to bring the weapons of truth, love, righteousness, and faith to bear, because they destroy reasonings. They pull down arguments, they demolish them, and the pride behind them. How does it all happen? It is to that question that we will address ourselves in our next study, but let me summarize it quickly by saying: It is by the gospel, by the declaring and demonstrating of the gospel. The gospel is, in its widest range, love, truth, faith, and righteousness. These are what the gospel is, these very things. Therefore we can demolish these strongholds by the demonstration of the gospel.

I am not talking now merely of preaching, or teaching the truth, or handing someone a New Testament, or a Bible or a tract. That is not what the Scripture means when it speaks of proclaiming the gospel. The Christian must be like those jet planes that are used in military warfare today. They have a machine gun or cannon mounted in the nose, and in order to bring it to bear upon an enemy the whole plane has to be aimed. There are no longer these old slow planes with a machine gun on a swivel mount that could be aimed in any direction while the plane flew straight on. No, you must aim the whole plane. Thus the whole life of the Christian has to be aimed. If your telling of the truth is canceled out by your failure to live it in our own experience, your failure to show the love of Jesus Christ and the warmth of acceptance, then you are producing not life, but death. It will be rejected, cast out, spewed out by society, as tasteless and useless and worthless. But when we truly bring the gospel to bear, what tremendous changes result.

Remember how Paul exemplified this when he went to the city of Corinth, where the people were buttressing their lives of immorality, shame, sordidness, and pagan barrenness, by arguments, and reasonings. Paul told them, "When I came to you, ... I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified," {1 Cor 2:1-2 KJV}. That is, I did not come to debate with you. I did not come with the wisdom of this world. I did not come to cancel out your arguments with a counter-argument. I did not come to debate philosophy. I came to declare to you that in Jesus Christ there is relief, release, and deliverance from the pride of the human heart; pride is slain by the cross. When you accept what this cross means, and what this One who died for you has done, and you kneel at his feet, there is released in your life a power that cancels out your pride. You are brought low before him, and God begins to make you over again on a different scale.

That is the power of the gospel.

That is the power of the Christian.

That is the message that will, alone, help society.

I wish we Christians could understand how great is this program that God has put in our hands. It is the only way out, there is not another. It is not merely one of certain alternatives by which the world can work out its problems; it is the only way out. When you begin to believe that, you will find a compassion awakening in your heart that has never been there before for your neighbors, your friends, and others who struggle on in the painful problems of life. You have the solution in your hands, the story of this One who can break the shackles of men, who can set them free. This One who came into human history, the Lord Jesus Christ, and who, when someone comes to him with all his burdens, his problems, and his enslavement, and says to him, "Lord Jesus, here I am. I can do nothing of myself; no one else can help me, but here I am; set me free," he does it! There is great power released.

How many here could testify to that!

He set you free from yourself, from your selfishness, and began the healing of your life, the flowing of rivers of water, the refreshment of joy, and the fulfilling of life.

This is what makes us gather Sunday after Sunday for the Lord's table. We are rejoicing together at what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. This table is no religious hocus-pocus. There is nothing about this Lord's supper that will do anything magical for you. If you expect it to perform some kind of religious magic in your life you are greatly mistaken. It is simply the expression of hearts that are filled with gratitude to the God who has loved them and has set them free in Christ. They have experienced something of the healing of the word and of the power of God. They look at a world around and long to impart this in some way to others, to find ways behind the defenses of men so that they might tell them effectively what this gospel is all about, this good news of God's healing grace in Christ. As someone has well put it, that is what evangelism basically is:

"One beggar telling another where he can find bread."

Prayer

Our Father, we do thank you for the glory of the gospel. How often it loses its glory in our eyes; how frequently we look upon it as though it were nothing more than another of the panaceas that men offer for the healing of ills! But we pray that you will help us to see, as we have never seen before, that it is the only way out. There are no other ways, there is no other means by which a man or a woman can be set free from these doctrines of demons, these plausible, reasonable-sounding arguments which enslave men and create the problems of our lives. Grant to us then, Lord, that we may give thanks from full hearts for what you have done for us, and increase our longing to impart it to others. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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