

HOW CHRISTIANS ATTACK

by Ray C. Stedman

We have come to a most critical point in our present series. In our study together in Second Corinthians 10, we have seen how the Apostle Paul has revealed the truth behind the problems we face in life, both individually and on the social level. These problems Paul calls *strongholds*, i.e., situations where evil is entrenched and produces hard, tough, difficult problems that are not easily solved. Who of us is not aware that we have many of these abounding in life today?

In our last study we saw the secret of the strength of these strongholds. We saw that it lies in two things which the apostle points out to us; that behind these problems that puzzle and bedevil society and individuals in any age -- and especially in our age -- are two elements: human pride, that is, pride as independence from God, self-sufficient humanity; and second, that pride expressed through clever and plausible arguments or *reasonings* that make the action based on pride sound like the logical thing to do. If you have been keeping up at all with the news media of our day, you are aware how widespread are these arguments and reasonings, these plausible-sounding defenses of the pride that is behind the problems of society. It is important for us to understand, as we seek to explain life in the light of the Scriptures, that they reveal that the heart of any social problem is always pride, this human sense of sufficiency without God.

There is nothing wrong with human sufficiency in itself. God intended man to be a capable being -- but not in himself. There is the great lie. He does not have capability in himself; it lies in God. Therefore the pride that sees man as being capable apart from God is an unrealistic, false illusion. Yet upon this illusion the worldly outlook upon life is based. Sometimes this pride is manifest, as we see today, in wounded ego, striking back at some fancied or real injustice -- the underdog mentality. Sometimes it is manifest as a kind of imperialistic self-assurance that rides roughshod over the feelings and rights of others. But in either case, whether it is the up-and-out or the down-and-out, it is pride that lies at the root of activity.

As we have already seen, when that pride is buttressed by arguments -- sometimes passionate, other times coldly logical -- it becomes strong, immovable, entrenched, and thus constitutes these *strongholds* that Paul speaks of here. To solve these problems, whatever they may be in their specific manifestations, it is clearly evident that we must deal with these two things. If Christians are going to be of any help at all in society, in the struggle of the world with these gripping, baffling, perplexing, demanding, and destructive problems, we must come to grips with these two issues, these arguments must be overthrown and the pride that is behind it must be humbled and brought low. And that, says the Apostle Paul, is what Christians, acting as Christians, are alone capable of doing. See his expression in Second Corinthians 10, Verses 4 and 5:

for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, {2 Cor 10:4-5 RSV}

Here the apostle brings into view the weapons of the Christian. He implies that they are clearly opposite to the weapons of the world. These unworldly weapons are, as we have already seen, truth, love, righteousness, and faith-prayer. And it is important to see, as we have suggested before, that these weapons find expression in the gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, that is what the apostle is talking about. The gospel is the proclamation of truth, the demonstration of love and righteousness, and the operation of faith-prayer. You have not declared the gospel if these four elements are not present, and you cannot have them present in any human situation without having proclaimed and demonstrated the gospel. They are interchangeable, identical things.

That is why, when the Apostle Paul came to Corinth (that great city in which the church to which this letter is addressed was located), he found in it men and women who were in the grip of serious social problems -- sexual perversion, sexual license, racial divisions, family feuds, political tyranny, etc. -- all the problems that we know today were present in Corinth. What did he say about his approach? Here he comes to this Greek

city, with its love of philosophy, and its love of human wisdom, and he throws down a gauntlet clearly and unmistakably. He says, "For I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified," {cf, 1 Cor 2:2}. That is what you need, that is the message that can help you.

In declaring that message, he was declaring the truth about life and about God. "Jesus Christ and him crucified" stands at the very heart of life; nothing can be understood properly apart from it. That is what the apostle means. With that message he also demonstrated the love of his heart in his willingness to deprive himself for their sake, to meet their physical and spiritual needs. He lived before them a wholesome, well-adjusted life, free from tension and stress, balanced in every way, a whole person. This made its impact upon these people. They saw in Paul a clear example of what he was talking about. He lived a righteous life. Also he prayed for them, as he himself declared, in the expectation that God would do great things to help them and to change them, to open their eyes and make them see life as it really was. In other words, he declared the truth, he demonstrated love, he lived a righteous life, and he practiced constantly prayer and faith for these people. Thus he declared the gospel, and, in that way, the apostle destroyed their arguments, brought low their pride, delivered them and set them free. These also are the weapons by which he proposes to go on attacking the strongholds he yet found entrenched in this church in Corinth.

It is tremendously important for us to see that the Christian approach to these arguments by which evil is entrenched in society, is not to try and destroy the arguments with counter-arguments. Paul says:

- I did not come to argue with you, or to discuss philosophy.
- I did not come to bandy about the wisdom of the world, or to argue with you on the basis of one viewpoint versus another, or one human authority against another.
- I came to introduce a new element.

Here is where the Christian must see the uniqueness of his position. Each of us is capable of introducing into any situation in which we find ourselves, a totally new element, a radical difference. This is what I labor to get across to Christians who are immersed in a pessimistic fog of despair. There is a radical difference about the gospel; a unique element is introduced into life. Paul puts it in one phrase, it is the truth about the cross of Jesus Christ. The word of the cross, he says, "is the power of God unto salvation," {Rom 1:16 KJV}.

It was that word of the cross, that truth about Jesus, coupled with love and righteousness and faith, that did the trick here in Corinth. And it is the only thing that will do the trick in our world today. On every hand you find leaders of thought who are sick and tired of the empty panaceas that men have been trying for centuries. They do not work. They merely quiet something here for the moment, only to have it break out again in another way. The world of our day is eloquent witness to the truth of that statement. How, then, does the gospel attack and destroy arguments? Perhaps we need to analyze this more closely, since we need to understand clearly the power of the Word of God in any human situation. After all, this gospel is not addressed to religious people. The gospel is addressed to the world in its desperate need, and therefore it is designed to do something about the need of the world.

How does it do it? The apostle says, in two ways. He lists two steps here:

- The first: "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God." We pull down (literally), we destroy these two things: arguments and pride.
- Second, we capture every thought to obey Jesus Christ.

I shall limit myself today only to the first of these. We will consider this very carefully, because here we are coming to the very heart of the apostle's whole argument. We must understand just how the gospel works in society.

The first thing it does, the apostle says, is to destroy or pull down arguments and pride. But it does this, not by an overwhelming counterattack against these arguments, we have already established that, but, rather, by a

process of undermining them. In other words, the gospel does not attack the reasonings of men directly. It is not simply a debate, or a dialogue even. The gospel is not an attempt to answer argument with counter-argument, or merely to expose the error in reasoning of those who offer false views of life. The gospel does not do that. Instead, it assaults the man behind the argument. That is the way it works. Instead of destroying the philosophy directly, the gospel captures the philosopher, and thus destroys the philosophy. It is very important that we see this plainly. The gospel undermines arguments by capturing the arguer; it reaches behind the argument to change the man. When that happens, you not only have ended the argument, but you have gained the man as a proponent for an entirely different view of life, changed him drastically and dramatically.

There are several ways in which this takes place. You can see it confirmed in life around you, and also illustrated very plainly and clearly in the Scriptures.

First, the gospel addresses itself to the vacuums created in the heart of man by the very arguments with which he supports his false ideas. In other words, it declares truth which lies beyond the reach of these reasonings, these arguments of men.

I was interested this week to read a review of C. S. Lewis' writings by a man who, though he was a Christian, was taking the position of an atheistic reviewer. In reviewing Lewis' book, *Mere Christianity*, which is his basic explanation of the Christian message, this reviewer said, from an atheistic point of view:

It is most disconcerting to have one's case against Christianity well in hand, only to find that Lewis doesn't give the answers we expect to refute.

Yes, it is disconcerting. It throws them, it puzzles them. They do not understand what you are doing. But this is the heart of the gospel. It reveals things men do not know, and yet which they sense are true. Thus it addresses itself to the vacuums in men's life which are not covered by their specious, reasoned arguments.

Let me show you what I mean:

Every man or woman without Christ, from the biblical point of view, is living, essentially, a limited, narrowed, one-dimensional life. Or, it is at best, two-dimensional. Most people, I find, are one-dimensional in their thinking. Life has length for all of us. We live out the years between our birth and our death, and that is the length of life. For many people that is about all you can say of them -- they just make it from here to there. It is merely a process of eating, sleeping, and going through the usual chores, and that is about it. But for some, life also has breadth, i.e., there is a wide range of interests they develop, and of experiences they go through. It is possible for man without God to have two dimensions in his life; that of length, and that of breadth.

But when man lives without Christ, and, therefore without the knowledge of God, life for him has no depth at all. Life is shallow, lived in the surface. It may be broad, but it is shallow; it has no depth. I find many people who confuse breadth with depth. They think that because they are educated and have a vast range of interest in many subjects and things, that this constitutes depth. But this is not depth; it is breadth. Many think that all they need to do is to broaden their interests and to find new hobbies, new projects, new things to captivate them. But that does not add another dimension; it only increases a dimension that is already there. You can have a broad life of many interests, as well as a long one; but you still have not added the dimension of depth.

This lack of depth is seen in human beings in several ways. It is revealed in restlessness, for instance, in not being captivated very long by anything, in becoming easily bored. That always indicates a lack of depth. Also a discontent, and an indifference to things of the spirit, is indicative of a lack of depth. Fear of solitude, or, paradoxically, a fear of crowds, is an indication of lack of depth. Yet because people are human beings, designed by God to live in three dimensions, when they cram their lives into just two, length and breadth, they deeply feel the lack of depth. There is something innate in man, something hidden, that hungers after the third world.

It is to these hidden hungers that the gospel speaks. It makes marvelous appeal and reaches behind the

arguments. After all, the arguments find expression only in the two dimensions with which man is familiar. The non-Christian thinks this is all there is to life and he has marshaled all his defenses in these two realms. But the gospel pays little attention to these. It speaks to that third realm, and, therefore, gets right down to the very heart of the man, behind the arguments. It does not try to answer them, does not try to reason with them -- there is a time and place for that later -- but it simply speaks to the hungers in man.

Those hungers are very evident in our world today. I ran across a quotation not long ago from T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Rock*, that expresses them very powerfully. He says,

All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
And all our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the life we have lost in living?

There are a lot of people asking that question today: Where is the life we have lost in living? Their lives are shallow, lived only on the surface, lacking the depth, the richness, that God alone can give. But this is not the way man was designed. The biblical view of the relationship of man and God is expressed in one short phrase from the 47th Psalm, "Deep calleth unto deep," {Psa 42:7 KJV}. That is what man is to be in relationship to God: The deeps in man are to cry out to the deeps in God and find fulfillment and satisfaction. The lack of that is creating the restlessness and the surging agony of life we see around us on every side today.

Now the gospel presents evidence of this third dimension to man. It says new things, startling things, remarkable things, frightening things, to the man who does not know God, to the man who lives in only two dimensions. Therefore the gospel puzzles him, and challenges him; it makes him think even when he does not want to think, even when he thinks that he has thought about everything. That is why we do not need to fear to speak these truths, for they are powerful in their ability to challenge the thinking of men and women.

I want to illustrate this in a contemporary way. Just this week I heard a story that was an excellent illustration of this power of the gospel to challenge the defenses of those who are opposed to God, and yet do it in a way for which they have no defense. Since I have been in Palo Alto, one of the greatest citadels of anti-faith that I know of has been the course on *History of Western Civilization* at Stanford University. I have seen the faith of many a young Christian undermined by that course. In many ways it has a great deal of value to it. I do not at all deplore the teaching of it -- it is an excellent subject, but the way it is taught is oftentimes highly destructive to weak Christian faith. I learned this week of the experience of a young man who is attending this church, and who is a student in a class on Western Civilization. What took place there is most interesting, illustrating the very things I am talking about. I want to introduce to you Steve Newman, and ask Steve to come and tell us what happened to him.

(Report by Mr. Newman)

About two months ago I began praying that God would give me some kind of opportunity in my Western Civ class to present the gospel clearly. I knew that the teacher wouldn't do so; and that the textbooks wouldn't do so, and I knew that if I just made a few statements in class they could be twisted in the minds of those who heard them. So I started praying, and got a lot of other people praying. About three weeks before we came to the section on Jesus, the teacher asked for volunteers to lead class discussions. Immediately after class I went up and volunteered to lead the class discussion on *The Life and Teachings of Jesus*. Here was the answer to my prayer, right there. Then I started really praying that God would help me and show me what to say to them.

The week before we got to this. I was reading in my textbook on the Old Testament, and the author made several statements doubting the reliability of the Old Testament. He said that Isaiah was written by two people, and the second half was written after the Babylonian exile, which would make a lot of it history instead of prophecy, that Daniel was written in the second century, B.C., instead of the sixth century, and he interpreted it so that it would all be history, instead of prophecy. This kind of shook me a little bit, so I called up Dave Roper and

had him bring over his books from the seminary. He spent all morning before class indoctrinating me and feeding me full of information. I went into class with a stack of books up to here, told the teacher I had done some research, and asked if I could present what I had found. He said "Yes," so I went through first the things that would back up this view of the "second" Isaiah, and then gave refutations of all these arguments. Then I went through the things that support the late-dating of Daniel, refuted all of them, then gave positive evidences for the early dating of both of these books, and showed how the author's interpretation of Daniel couldn't possibly be correct as to the four kingdoms, and his interpretation of the seventy weeks.

It all took about twenty minutes, and the people in the class were completely dumbfounded. I baffled them completely. They could accept that I could challenge the text: this didn't step on their toes too much, since it was nothing but Old Testament prophecy. But then, the following Tuesday, I started to present the reliability of the New Testament (I got Dave Roper to help me again with this), presenting the proofs of the resurrection, and went through all the different theories to try to explain the empty tomb and I refuted them, and then went through how the resurrection appearances couldn't have been hallucinations. At this point the teacher got up out of his chair. He was really uneasy, and said, "Why, I just thought you were going to present all that stuff and say, 'Look, you've got to accept this on faith.' Here you go through presenting all this rational stuff." This really shook him up, and they tried to argue with me about how my argument on the resurrection was stupid because it was all based on the premise that the Bible says that the tomb was empty. I explained to them that if the tomb had not been empty, then the Jews would have produced the body, and said, "Look, here is the body." But they still couldn't accept that.

So then I went through and just presented the claims of Christ, particularly his claim to be God, to be the Messiah, and what his claims to be the Messiah meant, to be God and yet to be a sacrifice for man's sin. The teacher again got a little bit upset here, and said, "Well, just because he claimed these things, what does that prove?" This I didn't try to prove. I just presented them and let them speak for themselves. Then I went through the *Kerygma*, which is the proclamation of the gospel, and I gave the Four Spiritual Laws in a slightly intellectualized form. I backed them up all from things Christ said himself, so they couldn't claim this was Pauline doctrine, or anything. The teacher thought this was great, but the class couldn't accept some of these things and started questioning me about Christians having closed minds, about Christianity being the only way, and things like this. I explained to them no other religion offers a means of atonement for our sins. They still had a lot of questions but you could tell the whole class was really thinking about these things. Just the fact that I presented the gospel to them was undermining some of their reasonings. But the only way I could have done this was through God and his help, and relying on Christ, and with the help of the prayers of scores of people.

(Mr. Stedman resumes)

Thank you, Steve, for sharing that with us. I will point out a couple of things about what he said and then we are through.

You will notice that there were two or three elements of supreme importance in Steve's approach:

1. First, the Christian presentation was rational. It was founded on fact. It did not set aside reason, nor did it overleap the need for intellectual understanding and grasp of the basis of these things, that they were founded in history. But the element that caused unrest and distress on the part of the students and teacher was the sense of the supernatural, the feeling that because of a rational basis they had no choice but to believe the fact of the supernatural, that God was at work in the book of Daniel. These prophetic passages could not be explained on any other terms than that God was at work in history.
2. Also, the resurrection of Jesus could never be explained except on terms of God at work doing

unusual things, supernatural things.

3. As Steve also mentioned, there was an appeal to the basic need of man, his need of forgiveness, his need of finding freedom from guilt and fear. This is where the gospel has power. It comes at man in an unexpected way, gets behind his carefully erected defenses, very much like the attack of the Nazis upon France in World War II. They simply ignored the Maginot Line that had been erected and went around it on an end sweep and came through the low countries into France. And so the gospel does, when properly presented. This is why it is impossible for men to erect adequate defenses against the gospel. We need to understand this. Do not try to assault the castle at its strongest point; there are also weak spots which can be breached and which make a man, even an intellectual, wide open to the assault of the gospel.

This is only the first of several ways in which the gospel destroys arguments and brings down pride.

We are going to look at the others together next week. But let us be thinking of how God can use us in this way, for the gospel is God's solution to the problems of life. I cannot stress that too strongly. This whole message is not something merely interesting to men who have a certain religious cast, but this is the fundamental answer to the fundamental problems with which men wrestle.

Let us see the gospel in that category.

Prayer

Our Father, we thank you for the power of this message, released among men. How weak we have been, oftentimes, in presenting it; how little we have understood its character and its might; how little we have grasped this, Lord. But we pray that we may become intelligent purveyors of this mighty message, that we, too, may see, as the Apostle Paul and his friends and co-laborers saw in his day and generation, a mighty overturning of the hearts and lives of men, in a widespread fashion in this our day, that evil may fade away and be minimized, and that men may be set free to be what you long for them and want them to be in Jesus Christ. We ask in his name, Amen.

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