



Storming Fortresses

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh,
but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4

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Food For Thought:

Preachers today have no authority for preaching their own notions and opinions; they must “preach the Word”—the apostolic Word recorded in the Scriptures. Whenever preachers depart from the purpose and intent of a biblical portion, to that extent they lose their authority to preach.

Jay E. Adams
Preaching With Purpose

The Power of the Word

By

John Lofton

Believe it or not – and I hope you do because it’s true – I look diligently for Christians to praise and encourage, both in this column and in private correspondence. I don’t particularly relish writing critically, all the time, about other believers. But the sad fact is that, today, there is very little solid Biblical preaching and application of God’s Word, the Bible.

For example, Dr. James Dobson’s Focus On The Family publication, *Citi-*

zen, recently ran two articles by Tom Minnery, FOF’s Vice President of Public Policy. One piece was titled “Moral Outrage

Is Not Enough;” the other, “How to Argue On unfriendly Terrain.”

In his first article, Minnery says the Bible has much to say about government, God ordained it, it’s

His servant, “yet today’s churches devote little time instructing members in their responsibilities toward government.” And he quotes Thomas Jefferson and George Washington as saying, respectively, that, “the Bible is the cornerstone of liberty” and “it is impossible to rightly govern... without God and the Bible.”

Well, amen! I said to myself. This is excellent stuff. Indeed, in my mind, I was already beginning to

So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Isaiah 55:11

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arate from political programs, its power as a source of compassion and love many times is unleashed.” And he concludes by warning us how to avoid “the pitfall of having the Gospel, and the Scriptures, dragged into political arenas and rejected out of hand.”

Now, I must speak plainly here, friends. It is difficult to imagine advice more un-Biblical, sinful and disastrous to the cause of Christ than that given by Tom Minnery.

For openers, there is no way – *none, zero, zip, zilch* – for Christians to preach God’s Word in the public square without Christians being accused of trying to force others to conform to “our religious beliefs.”

Why? *Because this is, in fact, precisely what we are trying to do!* Or, to put it more accurately, when we preach the Gospel, the Bible – and try to get God’s Law to be our civil law – we are trying to get others to conform to what God says, not “our religion.” But, so what? I mean even Minnery, in his first article, says, correctly, that God ordained government and He calls (“commands” is a better word, actually) government to be “his servant.”

Amen!

So, why is Minnery wringing his hands and worrying about what unbelievers will accuse us of? His problem seems to be that he fears men more than God. Yet Scripture commands us to say, boldly: “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:6).

Minnery seems not to understand what our Lord tells us in John 15:19: “If ye were of this world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of this world, but I chose

you out of this world, therefore the world hateth you.” And in Matthew 10:16 our Lord tells us that we are sent forth “as sheep in the midst of wolves.”

This latter verse may be the earliest good news / bad news joke. The bad news being that we *are* sent as sheep among wolves. The good news is, well, the Good News, the Gospel – that the Lord is our shepherd! And we must be of “good cheer” because He has “overcome the world” (John 16:33).

So, Christians should stop worrying about what “the world” thinks about them – the world, after all, crucified our Lord – and start obeying what God commands then to do!

In an exchange of correspondence on this same subject with Chuck Colson in January of 1990, Brother Chuck wrote, in part: “The fact is, however, that we can communicate Christian Biblical truth to a secular world without quoting Scripture, sometimes indeed doing it more effectively. I’ve argued in previous writings that we make a mistake when we attempt to constantly thrust the Bible at people who have a predisposition not to believe the Bible. Our argument falls of its own weight.”

Advocating the use of “intelligent, reasonable arguments using authorities and citations that the secular world believes in,” Colson says “I’m trying to reach a culture which is hostile ...”

Well, now. Weren’t our Lord, His Apostles, and the early church also trying to reach a hostile culture? You bet they were. And they did! – and in a spectacularly successful way. And what did they preach to achieve their triumph? The Word of God. As Michael Green tells us in his book,

compose the public column and / or my private, complimentary note I would send Brother Minnery.

But then, alas, I read the second article.

In this piece, he asks the question: “How can we bring our views to the public square without being accused of forcing others to conform to our religious beliefs?” And then, a little latter on, he answers this question thusly: “When Christians use reason and logic to make their points in public debate, they are really appealing to natural, moral law.”

With regard to our fight against pornography, Minnery says Christians “shouldn’t use Scripture. Instead, they should use moral arguments that make common sense to all.” And concerning the fight against homosexuality, he says this issue too “is argued more effectively in ‘moral’ terms than ‘scriptural’ terms.”

Minnery writes: “The fact is, when the gospel message is kept sep-

Evangelism In The Early Church
(William B. Eerdmans, 1970):

Wherever the early church went, it was the Word they carried. For 18 months and more at Corinth it was the Word that gripped Paul. It was the same at Ephesus during the two years of his mission [so] Acts 19:10 tells us: "All the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord."

When Luke wants to indicate the success of the mission, he says that the Word of the Lord grew and prevailed. The Word makes its own impact on Theophilus (Luke 1:1; Acts 1:1), the centurion or Cornelius (Acts 10:44), the proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:7), and the citizens of Antioch (Acts 13:44). No wonder they committed their converts to it (Acts 20:28). No wonder the nameless amateur missionaries of Acts 8:4 took it as their great weapon.

Does a man believe? Then it is because the Word brings faith (Acts 4:4). Does a man receive the Spirit? It comes from hearing the Word (Acts 10:44). Does a man become a Christian? It is due to God's illuminating the hearts of the hearers of the Apostolic message. Is a man a counterfeit Christian? Then it is because he has no part in the Word (Acts 8:21).

Says Green (emphasis mine):

It is no exaggeration to say that the Word of God is the prime agency under the Spirit of God for the mission of the Church in evangelism.

Faith. Yes, *faith*. That's what we're talking about here. You either believe what God says about His Word – that it "*is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) – and you preach it. Or you don't. Period.

As for Brother Chuck's apparent certainty regarding those with a "predisposition not to believe the Bible," well, I would say this, in love: Oh, ye of little faith. The truth of the matter is that before any of us preach the Word of God to anybody, we have no idea, really what their predisposition is. But, we do know for certain, because God says it, that:

All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

And, Oh what marvellous blessings are poured out upon us when God's Word is *faithfully* preached!

In his book, *The Puritan Hope* (Banner of Truth, 1971), Ian Murray notes that when John Knox preached God's Word, the spiritual revival in Scotland became general. He quotes Knox as saying: "God did so multiply our number that it appeared as if men had rained from the clouds."

In his book, *Liberty And Reformation In The Puritan Revolution* (Columbia University Press, 1955), William Haller points out that the "overriding endeavor" of the Puritans was "at all times" to "preach the Word" with the result being that Puritanism was "a great dynamic force" in the life of the English people, causing "a cyclonic shattering storm of the spirit."

And in his book, *The Revolution Of the Saints: A Study In The Origins Of Radical Politics* (Harvard University Press, 1965), Michael Walzer also chronicles the power of the Puritans who preached, without ceasing, God's Word, and sought (Brother Minnery, Please note) "zeal and not affection."

Walzer notes that what the Puri-

tans engaged in was "the work of reconstruction," a reformation of the entire social order, "not only the church, but the state, the household, the school, even the theatre and the sports arena – religion, culture, family, and politics."

So, my fellow Christians, forget, please, the blather about using "reason and logic" and "natural law." As St. Paul says in Colossians 2:8: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

Stop, please, my brethren in the faith, being like 120,000 in Nineveh who, in terms of God, know not their right hand from their left. Realize, please, that trying to use worldly wisdom to convert the world, in a *spiritual war*, is using "a Devil's shield against a Devil's sword," as Cotton Mather said of those who used so-called white magic against witchcraft.

Please stop making a distinction between Scripture and "moral arguments" when, for Christians, Scripture is the only basis for any morality. And, please, stop saying that there is a morality that is "common sense to all," when there is no such thing.

The "pitfall" is *not* "dragging the Gospel and the Scriptures into political arenas:" it is failing to do this.

So far by John Lofton.
Additional material by
Murray McLeod-Boyle

The issue raised by Mr. Lofton in this article is very important. It is an issue that every Christian should con-

sider thoughtfully and seriously. The issue is as relevant today as it was when Mr. Lofton penned these words some ten years ago.

Where does the Power of God's Word rank in your theology? When you think of evangelism, do you immediately think of the Power of God's Word or do you think about "Evangelism Explosion", "Christianity Explained", "Five Spiritual Laws", and the "Alpha Programme".

For most people, they accept the programmes that are promoted by the hierarchy of their Church. The idea that the minister is trained and therefore should be listened to with respect, is a concept we have little problem with. However, this does not excuse us from not thinking and not studying God's Word.

One of the greatest tragedies of the last fifty years is the fact that most ministers have implicitly denied their calling. You see, they have been ordained as ministers of the Word and sacraments. Note that the terms are always placed in this order because the sacraments are seen as a visible expression of the Word. Without the Word the symbols lack meaning.

Yet many ministers have set about fundamentally destroying their ordained roles by neutering the Word. They no longer believe the Word. The Word is no longer acceptable to these people as the only multi-purpose tool in the shed. Though it has been designed and forged by the hand of God specifically for the purpose of directing man, modern ministers have abandoned it.

Do these people purport to be wiser than God? No, they don't, generally speaking. What has happened is that they have been fooled into believing that psychology, anthropology, sociology, and even zoology,

have more up to date information about Man and his world, thus rendering the Bible obsolete.

If we may, we would describe it this way. For centuries archaeologists used the Bible as an extremely accurate guide book for historical data. This included the location of towns, ideas about customs, dates for different events, and so on. After a time of using the Bible as a guide to these things, the archaeologists abandoned this approach and began to interpret the finds from their digs through the spectacles of their own belief system.

The Bible's claims were ignored. The Bible's history was reinterpreted or denied. The meaning of the Hebrew text was even changed, modified, or discredited. Evidence for this abounds. Look to the pages of most Old Testament commentaries and you will find Liberal scholars who attempt to smooth out difficulties in the Biblical text on the basis of the Ugaritic or Babylonian writings. Similar can be said about customs. Now the important thing is that almost without exception, it is the Bible that has to give way to all other cultures.

Now this incongruity should be apparent to all. The Bible was used by the archaeologists as an accurate guide in finding historic sites. Once those sites yielded some goodies the Bible was discarded.

Similarly, the ministers have used the Bible to lead them to certain junctures, however, once there, they have abandoned it and turned aside to monsters of their own making. These monsters are the invention of evangelistic programmes to stand in the stead of the Power of God's Word.

Now this may be hard for some as they may have come to Christ through these means. This then

brings us to a secondary point—do not be fooled by results! Prof. Alistair McEwen has well said that, "the Lord has used many a crooked stick to make a straight hit." Therefore, just because a programme yields some success, it does not mean that it is God's ordained way of proceeding in that matter.

To give life to our contention we would ask that people consider the Word. Where in its pages do we see anything like a programme being developed? The closest we come to anything like this is found in the Great Commission where God empowered His ordained and commissioned men to go and preach the Message. Remember that the Greek term we render as "apostle" can mean "messenger" or "envoy" and primarily points to that person being authoritatively commissioned (and sent) for a particular task.

So Christ sent out His "messengers" as "envoys" once they had been "commissioned" to that task. This we must not forget. The Word was entrusted to a certain few. It was for these commissioned ones to authoritatively proclaim the message.

This we find attested in the pages of Scripture. Paul states that:

For the **word of the cross** is to those who are *perishing foolishness*, but to us who are being **saved it is the power of God**. For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased **through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe**. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search

for wisdom; but **we preach** Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.¹

There is little possibility of misunderstanding Paul's message at this point. The "Word" is the Power of God. We also note that this power is unleashed in a particular way. Paul says, "he preaches." It is that simple. There are no programmes, spiritual laws or man-made concepts. Paul, the commissioned envoy of Christ,² preached and thereby unleashed the power of God.

Paul's confidence concerning this truth is evidenced elsewhere as well. Please consider the following:

Romans 1:15-16: Thus, for my part, I am eager **to preach the gospel** to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for **it is the power of God** for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

1 Corinthians 15:11: Whether then *it was* I or they, so **we preach** and so you believed.

2 Corinthians 4:5: For **we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord**, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

Finally, Paul gave instruction to his charge Timothy:

Preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction (2 Timothy 4:2).

The Westminster Divines were also convinced of the need to uphold this important doctrine:

The **supreme judge** by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other **but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture**. (Matt. 22:29,31, Eph. 2:20, Acts 28:25)

Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, (Col. 2:17) was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are **the preaching of the Word**, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, (Heb. 10:39) is the work of **the Spirit of Christ** in their hearts, (2 Cor. 4:13, Eph. 1:17-19, Eph. 2:8) and is ordinarily **wrought by the ministry of the Word** (Rom. 10:14,17).³

What is the word of God? The holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are **the word of God**, (2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Pet. 1:19-21) **the only rule of**

faith and obedience. (Eph. 2:20, Rev. 22:18-19, Isa. 8:20, Luke 16:29,31, Gal. 1:8-9, 2 Tim. 3:15-16)⁴

What are the outward means whereby Christ communiceth to us the benefits of redemption? The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communiceth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, **especially the Word**, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation. (Matt. 28:19-20, Acts 2:42,46-47)

How is the Word made effectual to salvation? The **Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners**, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation. (Neh. 8:8, 1 Cor. 14:24-25, Acts 26:18, Ps. 19:8, Acts 20:32, Rom. 15:4, 2 Tim. 3:15-17, Rom. 10:13-17, Rom. 1:16)⁵

The truth concerning the power of the Word of God and its right use by God's ordained messengers is amply attested in Scripture. The aspect that grieves the heart is the non-compliance by modern ministers. Now not all are guilty of this, but we suggest that the majority are.

Some examples. There was the minister who sent his parishioners down the road to a "Christian" counsellor as he believed the counsellor was better equipped. Some may agree with this. We would argue that

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1. *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. All quotations in this section are from this source. Bible quotations in Mr. Lofton's work are from the KJV. Bold added to the Scripture quotations.
 2. The picture we have here is one echoed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:20, when he says, "We are ambassadors for Christ." Paul understood that he was a commissioned representative of Christ, authorised to speak on His behalf.
 3. Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995. Chapter 1, section 10; Chapter 7, section 6; Chapter 14, section 1. Bold added.
 4. Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995. Q&A3. Bold added.
 5. Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995. Q&A 88; Q&A 89. Emphasis added.

a minister who takes this course of action is either displaying a disbelief in his own understanding of the Bible or a disbelief in the Bible itself. That it is often the second of these is borne out by our second example. We once sat in an interview. The panel consisted of three men who held official jobs within the church structure. During the interview the discussion came to the Word. The exact question has been forgotten (dodgy memory to accompany our grey hairs!!), however, the conversation turned to ordination vows. One of the ministers present proudly announced that he had his ordination vows changed. In the denomination to which these men belonged, their ordination vows ask, in part:

Do you believe the Word of God which is contained in the Scripture of the Old and New Testament to be the **only rule of faith** and practice?

The wording of this question reflects that of Question and Answer 3 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, cited above. Note that both speak of the Word as the *only* rule of faith. As you well know, “only” means only! The word does not admit to any other contenders being allowed onto the field. The word “only,” in light of the Scriptures shown above, is the *only* appropriate choice.

Yet this wording caused obvious pain to our aforementioned minister. He could not subscribe to the *only*, so he had his friend, another ordained minister, substitute the word “supreme.” Two things come to the fore. First, there is deceit. Minister A, in order to be ordained, recruited Minister B to change the ordination vow. Both men were guilty of deliberately changing part of a church’s order. Minister A, instead of addressing himself to the issues at hand, namely the church ordinances and the reasons why he could not uphold the “only,” chose instead to go ahead

with subtle changes in wording. Our warning is, if this guy has married you, you may want to check that you really are married. He may have changed a word or two that he could not agree with.

Second, and this is the greater concern, four ministers all had little problem with this deception or could not really see that this change in one word destroyed a doctrine of Scripture which had been penned by God Himself. To spell this out clearly, neither of the ministers at the interview raised an eyebrow when their ministerial colleague made his announcement. Further, the minister reading the ordination vow also willingly changed the words. Finally, it is obvious that other ministers were present at this ordination. Did they not hear the change or did they simply not care?

To make matters a little worse, the chap to whom we are referring did not make a simple announcement. He went on to illustrate ways in which the Word had been superseded in various milieus found in life. Again, neither of those ordained men present objected.

These subtle trends away from Biblical doctrine cannot be tolerated any longer. There is a Proverb which says:

A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest”—And your poverty will come in like a vagabond, And your need like an armed man (Proverbs 6:10-11).

Modified, we could make it read, A little changing of the Word here, A little denying of the Word there—and unbelief will come like an unwelcome stranger; and heresy as a destroyer at your gate.

The Church wonders why it does

not have an impact on the world. Ministers of all denominations huddle in little groups pondering why the world will not submit. They recommend new ways, adopt the latest strategies, do demographic studies, pore over the Census results, consult Sigmund, and / or contemplate their navels, all in the hope that they might find that one key which will unlock the oyster and reveal the pearl of great price.

All the while, most of them deny the Power of the Word of God. How is this done? It is very simple. You adopt a belief system that states one or other of the following: To mention “sin” is a put off to moderns; We must only be loving; We must be open and affirming; We must be tolerant; To challenge sinners directly will scare them away; Let’s give the sinner a job to do, then he will stay; Let’s finish every sermon with an alter call, we are sick of preaching to the converted; The Church’s only mission is to save sinners; Pastor, we noticed that you broke the 59 minute, 59 second rule set for worship! Oh, sorry, that will not happen again (squeak); You cannot require anything of people! They will leave; Preach on tithing? Do we have a budgetary problem?; This morning’s sermon was inspired by what I read in the newspaper...; In an effort to communicate the gospel we are introducing a skit section to worship; Yes, we are all ministers of the Gospel—every Christian; Don’t mention Hell, it’s a no-no subject; We can’t be sombre in worship, we must always be happy; I would like to tell you a story; I like this type of service; I can’t worship without a guitar; and the list could go on!!!!

God appointed the foolishness of preaching to be the Power of God unto salvation. It is also the Power of sanctification. God’s Word brings life to the sinner and light to the saint.

We deny this doctrine, implicitly or explicitly, to our own detriment.

Brethren, if we would see the world engaged and changed, then we must do so with the Power of the Word of God. We must not be ashamed to use it, even in the public square. We must not shy from the truth and the reality it gives. It is true that we are not all called to preach the Gospel as God's commissioned representatives, but we are all charged with believing that God's Word is all

Powerful and that it alone is our rule for faith and practice. In short, no matter what our vocation we are required *to apply* God's Word to every aspect of our lives. "Faith and Practice!" What we believe and how we behave.

To believe anything else, is to entertain the idea that God's Word is not all sufficient. When that happens, it is only a short step to saying that God's Word is insufficient. At this point, you have cut yourself adrift

from the only moorage that is true, constant, and immovable.

It comes down to this. We either believe the Word of Almighty God—Eternal, Omniscient, Omnipresent; Omnipotent, Infinite, Unchanging, Powerful—or we believe the word of Man—fallen, corrupt, finite, powerless.

A Word of Power or a word of...well, just a word!?!??

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