

The Weapons of Our War

2 Corinthians 10: 1-6

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The apostle Paul knew he was in a fight. And he knew that the fight was not really just about problem people in the Corinthian church. It was about the spiritual contest behind all our outward conflicts. It was about the startling news of the gospel dismantling the thought patterns that controlled people's lives and actions. It was about overcoming the natural human hostility to God's claim on our lives. It was about wielding the weapons of God against the resistance of a rebellious world. It was a war of love fighting to liberate people from the chains of legalism, destructive sensuality, and distorted views of God.

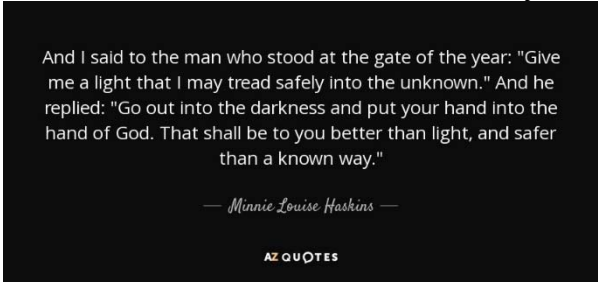
So he wrote, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." In this passage, spiritual warfare is directed primarily in the arena of the mind. Paul wants to light up darkened minds with the gospel. To get the light in, though, he has to pull down walls of thought patterns that keep us from perceiving the true God. I'd like to give you some examples today of how this works.



I loved the movie *The King's Speech*. It won the 2011 Academy Award for best picture and best actor. The film depicted King George VI's struggle to overcome his childhood stammering in order to speak encouragement to a nation entering years of war. In itself, the movie was great. But historically, they left out the best part. I kept waiting for the most famous lines of the King's radio address at Christmas of 1939. With Hitler raging in Europe, an anxious nation longed to hear words of hope. King George delivered those words and they became immediately iconic. But the movie never mentioned them. Last week I watched a documentary called *The Real King's Speech*. I thought, "Surely

this will include his most important words.” But no, never mentioned. Shall I tell them to you?

It seems that King George’s wife, who became Queen Mother to the current Queen Elizabeth, had found these words by a relatively unknown Christian poet. She sent her 13-year-old daughter Elizabeth into the King’s study with a copy. He concluded his radio address this way:



And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way."

— *Minnie Louise Haskins* —

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And then he concluded by adding, “May that Almighty Hand guide and uphold us all.”

Now that’s worth hearing! King George wielded the weapon of spoken prayer. As the most powerful man in Britain, he proclaimed his humble need for God to guide him. He did what great kings are supposed to do: to acknowledge the one true, high King. Why would moviemakers ignore that beautiful speech? Why would a documentary fail to mention the words that inspired a nation? Because the western world is caught in the grip of a powerful thought stronghold. Its walls are made of this: there is no one higher than me. There is no greater power than man. We can figure this out. We know what to do. There is no one out there who can save me or to whom I am accountable.” The whole fortress comes down if someone in authority says, “We can’t solve this on our own. We don’t know the way. We need divine guidance. We need God. And we ask God to guide us according to his will, not ours.”

Speaking aloud your need for God is a powerful countercultural weapon. It can be wielded in love. Modelling prayers for God’s will to be done exposes the fact that we are not very good at being gods ourselves. That’s why offering to pray for someone is such a powerful gesture of love. You invite someone to allow you to take the humble place. You come alongside and say, “I know you and I can’t solve this issue. But I know someone who can. Let’s ask him to help us and guide us.”

Every year the people suggested to become new elders and deacons undergo a time of training in our beliefs and practices. One of the sessions is always on

theology, what we believe about who God is. As I prepared, I remembered a remarkable interview I had many years ago. It was an hour which changed my life. I fished around in my file drawers (yes I still have some paper files!) and found the little note pad from my meeting with Dr. Alister McGrath at Wycliffe Hall in Oxford. McGrath received a doctorate from Oxford in molecular biophysics. He



Knows his science. But McGrath says he pursued science because he wanted to know the meaning behind all things. And eventually, he realized science could only take him so far. So he achieved a doctorate in theology from Oxford and began teaching there, specializing in the intersection between science and theology. He's a best selling author and a fabulous debater of skeptics. His book *The Dawkins Delusion* cordially, measuredly but absolutely shredded the ideas of his Oxford colleague Richard Dawkins.

McGrath gave us one hour. He set the clock on his huge computer screen, so we dove right in. What I remember most was his energy for thinking about Christ. He brimmed with winsome confidence that Christian theology is the deepest, greatest thing going. We asked McGrath about how to proclaim the gospel in a western world that has become completely pluralistic. How do we advance Jesus in a culture that recoils against the idea that any one view is true? This didn't faze McGrath at all. Over and over he said it's time for Christians to recover their confidence. We were born into a pluralistic world. Our vision transformed that world and it still does. Our worldview holds together at the deepest levels. He thinks it's great to respect all traditions and to let the various views talk to each other with respect and openness. Because McGrath believes passionately that we should respect our own faith tradition. And learn to talk about what we believe quite openly, and risk that because of the attractiveness of our gospel, someone just might come to Christ!

McGrath bubbled with enthusiasm as he urged the church to recover the beauty of our doctrine about Christ. We need to start thinking again. Because

thought is on our side! We have the intellectual goods. He said, “Doctrine is the coat that comes from weaving the threads of Scripture together. Our people yearn to know how all the strands of faith fit together. They want to know that their faith in Christ is credible. They want to learn the story in its depth. Leaders have to build a vision for the quest to know Jesus more truly and deeply.”

It was indeed an hour that changed my life. I felt something ignite in me. I knew I had been lazy. I hadn’t really been mining for the treasures of truth in the Christian storehouse. I hadn’t been showing how all the parts fit together. I had been preaching without the power and depth of the truth. It was time. We have a weapon that takes down strongholds. It’s the coherence and depth and beauty of Christian thought about Christ. It’s the fullness of the Word that shows us who God really is. It’s time, long overdue, for Christ’s church to learn and to learn to speak the beauty of our story.

A couple weeks ago, I was working on next year’s Lenten prayer guide. I was thinking in my study when I looked idly at the bookshelf and spied this book. It’s called *When Christ Takes Over* by Simon Blocker. I want to tell you the story of why I have this book and why it matters to me.



Until my grandfather died, our family spent summers in Holland, Michigan, where all my mother’s family was from. My grandfather died when I was five, so I realized that I could not have been more than four years old when I met Simon Blocker. The family had taken me to Centennial Park in downtown Holland. It’s a lovely park, with tree lined walks, benches, and open places to play. I remember that we met a man in a suit and an old-fashioned wide-brimmed hat. I also remember realizing that Granddaddy knew him. There was excitement in the greeting. My grandfather seemed to light up at the sight of this man who was a longtime friend. I could feel that this man was important and this meeting was special.

Of course I could not have processed all this at the time, but I realize now how seldom I saw my grandfather or my father with male friends. I was watching a comradery I had never seen before. This man was Simon Blocker. He was a minister like my grandfather. They were colleagues and had known each other for years. By that time, Dr. Blocker was teaching at the seminary in Holland. They sat on the bench and laughed and talked. Simon Blocker was kind to me, and didn't mind my hanging around. I was being let into the circle. It's amazing to me that I have impressions of that encounter all these years later.

So when we were sorting through my grandfather's books years later, of course I wanted this volume by Simon Blocker. The other day I took it off the shelf and read through it. Listen to what he wrote in 1945:

Christianity today confronts not only indifference but positive, powerful and malignant hostility. Reversion to paganism, usurpation of power, recourse to arrogant, conscienceless savagery, and ruthless use of diabolic scientific techniques for indiscriminate massacre have marked outrageous effort to... whip humanity into submission and despair. This had been part of an effort to wipe out Christianity as a factor in the life of mankind.

The weakened hold of Christianity on modern man explains the plight of man. It shows what happens when Christianity loses ground. It makes plain what the world is in for when Christianity is laughed out of court or treated with hateful contempt. It gives lie to the claim that it makes no difference what a man believes. It is being constantly proven that if man will not let Jesus Christ take over, he is exposed to the most terrible possibilities.¹

Simon Blocker wrote that in 1945! Right after America had won the war. At the very outset of the golden age of church attendance in the 1950's. In a time I always thought was a very Christian culture. But he saw something different. He saw the age-old strongholds of lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God. He saw the rise of individualism. The ego of insisting that my choices must be granted. People determining to do what they want, no matter the cost.

Simon Blocker's passion was to show that without Christ, life doesn't work. What is good in the world fades to the degree that Christian values and faith fade. Dr. Blocker issued a call first to the church. For Christians to once again give Christ control of their lives. To bow the knee to him. To go all in with Jesus. He writes,

To be a Christian is the most drastic, exacting, costly, revolutionary and humanly impossible undertaking conceivable. It will cost anyone his life to be a Christian...To be a Christian means absolute self-abdication from managing one's own life and signing on the dotted line, as it were, to let Christ take over. No one naturally dares to be a Christian. One's native disposition is to shrink from [Christ,] to build up defenses against him in self-justification.

Only God knows what life does to us. God knows also why life does such devastating injury. God has done something about it. God has come down and stepped in to undo and to make victory possible. Christ is the answer. Christ is God, God incarnate, God become man to save us, to see us through, no matter what happens....Christ is the great Companion, the answer to the need and longing of the human heart for enduring love and fellowship...Christ is the answer to our need for Someone to be in control of this world. He is the answer to our sin and our death. His salvation is totally comprehensive.²

I met Simon Blocker when he was in his 80's and I was 4. But I would learn years later that we are soul companions. His passion is my passion. To wield the divine weapon of truth in order that people might be saved. To expose the reality that without Christ, life does not work. But when Christ takes over, we receive the peace, the forgiveness, the purpose, the mission, and the hope for which we long. From King George to Alister McGrath to Simon Blocker to Paul the Apostle comes the same story. The gospel takes down our walls of self-reliance. It exposes our folly and our need. But then, almost at the same time, the gospel gives us the assurance that God loves us and is with us and will see us through. Yes, King George, it is time for us to look away from ourselves and put our hand into the hand of God, trusting him with our lives. Yes, Dr. McGrath, it's time for us to recover our confidence in this message. It's time to learn to speak winsomely and beautifully the truth of the gospel. Yes, dear old Dr. Blocker, it is time for us to let Christ take over!

¹ Simon Blocker, *When Christ Takes Over* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1945), p. 10

² *Ibid*, pp. 32-33.