

CASTING DOWN FORTRESSES, 2 COR 10:3-5, A. MCCAFFERTY, JULY 2006

林後 10:3 因為我們雖然在血氣中行事，卻不憑著血氣爭戰。 10:4 我們爭戰的兵器，本不是屬血氣的，乃是在神面前有能力可以攻破堅固的營壘， 10:5 將各樣的計謀，各樣攔阻人認識神的那些自高之事，一概攻破了，又將人所有的心意奪回，使他都順服基督。

In these verses, Paul describes his ministry as a spiritual war. He tells us that by the power of God, he and co-workers “攻破堅固的營壘”。 In verse five he explains the meaning of “攻破堅固的營壘”。 What is it that they destroy? They destroy “各樣的計謀”，“各樣攔阻人認識神的那些自高之事”。 The end of verse five tells us his purpose: 又將人所有的心意奪回，使他都順服基督。

The Greek word translated “計謀” in verse five of the Union version is λογισμός. It actually means “thought” or “reasoning” or argument”. The 新譯本 translation is a good one: 詭辯. The 新譯本 writes that Paul and his co-workers “攻破詭辯”。 In these verses Paul is talking about his debates with Greeks, Jews, and Pagans. He tells us that their proud thoughts, reasonings, and arguments are “raised up against the knowledge of God”. Paul’s ministry is to refute these thoughts and arguments, and bring every thought captive to Christ. The Greek word translated “心意” in the phrase “將人所有的心意奪回，使他都順服基督” supports this interpretation of these verses. The basic meaning of the word is “thought”. The NIV translates the phrase as “and take every thought captive to obey Christ”.

In every city where Paul went, he had a great struggle against religious errors. In the Greek and Roman society, he struggled against the errors and proud arguments of idol worship. Among the Jews he struggled against their misunderstandings of the Old Testament. Within the church, he struggled against the errors of false prophets. Pagans, Jews, and the false Apostles were all building great systems of thought; and furthermore, they gloried in their “scholarship”. These systems of thought are what he describes as “strong fortresses 堅固的營壘”。 They were defended by proud men who exalted themselves above Paul and even above God. Paul tells the Corinthians that he is not intimidated by such men, because they fight with the weapons of the flesh. They use all sorts of irrelevant rhetoric, obscure philosophy, twisted theology, and exalted claims about themselves and their authority. But Paul fights with the weapons of God. He speaks the truth plainly in love. He proclaims the self-attesting Christ and him crucified. His message is full of the force of truth. The righteousness of his cause is manifest to every enlightened observer. In his preaching, the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ shines in the darkness. True, this light is veiled to those whose hearts are hard. But this is because the devil has blinded their eyes. To those who have eyes to see, through Paul’s preaching God shines his light “in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:3-5).

In his excellent commentary of 2nd Corinthians, Charles Hodge gives a good explanation of Paul’s meaning. I quote his comments on verse 5 at length:

What the apostle was confident he could cast down were *imaginings* (*λογισμούς*), *thoughts*; that is, the opinions, or convictions of those who set themselves and the deductions of their own reason against the truth of God. By “*every high thing*自高之事”, Paul means every tower, or fortress; the same as “strong fortress 堅固的營壘” in verse 4. He is not referring to persons, but thoughts. It is every thing which the pride of human reason exalts against *the knowledge of God*; that is that revelation of himself which God has made in the gospel. The conflict to which the apostle refers is that between truth and error, between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. When the gospel was first proclaimed it found itself in conflict with all the forms of religion and philosophy then prevailing among men. To the wise of this world the gospel appeared as foolishness. It was, however, the wisdom and power of God. The conflict then begun has continued ever since, and is now as deadly as at the former period. Men of science and philosophers are as confident in their conclusions, and as much disposed to exalt themselves, or their opinions against the knowledge of God as ever. There is no doubt as to the outcome of this contest. It is a contest between God and man, in which, of course, God must prevail. The instructive lesson which the apostle designs here to inculcate is, that this warfare must not be conducted on the part of the advocates of the gospel, with carnal weapons. They must not rely upon their own resources and attempt to overcome their enemies by argument. They must not become philosophers and turn the gospel into a philosophy. This would be to make it a human conflict on both sides. It would be human reason against human reason, the intellect of one man against the intellect of another man. Paul told the Corinthians in his former letter, that he did not appear among them as a philosopher, but as a witness; he came not with the words of man’s wisdom; he did not rely for success on his powers of argument or of persuasion, but on the demonstration of the Spirit. The faith, which he labored to secure, was not to be founded on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God; not on arguments addressed to the understanding, but on the testimony of God. That testimony has the same effect which intuition has. It reveals the truth of the mind and conscience as self-evident; and therefore it cannot be resisted. A rationalistic Christian, a philosophizing theologian, therefore, lays aside the divine for the human, the wisdom of God for the wisdom of men, the infinite and infallible for the finite and fallible. The success of the gospel depends on its being presented, not as the word of man, but as the word of God; not as something to be proved, but as something to be believed. It was on this principle that Paul acted, and hence he was in no degree intimidated by the number, the authority, the ability, or the learning of his opponents. He was confident that he could cast down all their proud imaginings, because he relied not on himself but on God whose messenger he was.

There are two points worth noting. The first is the stress Hodge puts on “testimony”. The Christian is not a philosopher; we are witnesses. We know that the world was created by our triune God, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and is coming back again, that the Bible is God’s word. Our call is to witness to these things. We witness to them not only among the unlearned, but also among the learned. The second thing to note Hodge stresses that testimony is like intuition. The truth of the testimony and the truthfulness of the

testifier is immediately grasped. When Paul witnessed, it was evident to all fair observers that what he was speaking the true. Paul and his message were, in the words of the Reformed faith, “self-authenticating”. It was just like listening to a very good sermon. All who hear, know that the truth is being proclaimed.

Our faith is not built on arguments. However, in every generation there are “scholarly” movements that claim they can refute the gospel of God. Charles Hodge tells us that it was true in the 19th century, and it is certainly true today. How should Christians respond? We should not be afraid of such movements. Rather, ministers of the Gospel should refute them. On the one hand, we testify to the truth of the Gospel, on the other hand we “tear down rhetoric 攻破詭辯”. Scholars are men like the rest of us. They have their own biases. They become famous by promoting new ideas. They are not above using empty rhetoric. Ninety percent of new ideas in Biblical studies are implausible. After fifty years, they fall away into obscurity. When we look back over the hundred and seventy years of biblical scholarship, we see a wide array of implausible claims confidently asserted. Put simply, the gospel is the truth of God, and it has force of God’s truth. No one can refute it. Scholars who claim to do so are building a castle on a foundation of sand. And time will reveal this.

Last term I taught a course on Dr. N.T. Wright’s book “What Saint Paul really said”. In the book, N.T. Wright presents a version of the “New Perspective on Paul”. This “New Perspective on Paul” is one of the “strong fortresses 堅固的營壘” that raises itself up against the knowledge of God 攔阻人認識神的那些自高之事 today. Wright claims in the book that Luther and the Reformation misunderstood the meaning of Paul’s doctrine of “Justification by Faith alone”. For Luther and all Protestants, Justification by Faith is at the heart of the gospel and soteriology. But Wright claims that Paul’s doctrine of Justification by Faith was “more about ecclesiology than about soteriology”. The root problem, according to Wright and all New Perspective scholars, is that “we” have misinterpreted first century Judaism. We must first understand Paul from the perspective of first century Judaism. Then we will understand “What Saint Paul really said”.

I don’t reply to Wright in this article. I will testify that the first time I read Wright’s book, I was astounded. In my estimation, it is full of irrelevant rhetoric, confused theology, and improbable exegetical claims. Furthermore, all of these are presented with great confidence. (For those who are interested, my course notes are available on our website.) Although I don’t reply to Wright, in this edition of our school bulletin, two students reply. These replies were the term papers that they wrote for my course. My goal in teaching this course was to teach students to read books critically. I especially wanted them to learn to spot irrelevant rhetoric, the presuppositions of the author, and questionable or confused claims. I think you will agree as you read the two term papers in this school bulletin, that at least these two students learned these lessons well. They (and many others in the class) have made a good start at tearing down strongholds 攻破堅固的營壘.