

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

Vol. XIV, No. 1

©Gary North, 1990

Jan./Feb. 1990

THE "SEARCH AND REPLACE" STRATEGY

by Gary North

There is a feature on most word processing programs called "search and replace." Say that you have just completed the first draft of an essay on the life of Moses. Because you have not yet bought a computerized Bible verse search program that allows you to locate and then insert fully proofed and corrected Bible passages into your text, you then check a Bible verse to make certain that you have transcribed it accurately. You notice for the first time in your life that **Pharaoh** is not spelled **Pharoah**. You also know that the misspelled word appears throughout your manuscript.

You then invoke the "search and replace" feature of your word processor. You tell it to search the entire document, replacing the misspelled word with the accurately spelled word which you designate. You even have a choice: tell it either to change all the misspelled words automatically or to allow you to authorize each substitution one by one. In this case, you would choose "automatic." Once invoked, this procedure takes about two seconds if you have a fast computer and a medium-sized document.

Any word processing program that lacks this feature is regarded as substandard. It is not enough to remove the misspelled word; you must replace it. This is equally true of social reform movements. Successful surgery involves more than mere cutting and burning.

Search and Destroy

In wartime, military units are assigned "search and destroy" missions. The enemy is to be searched out and destroyed when located. The assumption is that the enemy must be removed from the battlefield entirely. This is an appropriate **tactic** for military affairs, once the war has broken out. But the overall **strategy** is not the total destruction of the enemy power; the goal is victory. The announcement of unconditional surrender as an offensive strategy is therefore morally illegitimate. There are always conditions in the affairs of men. Unconditional surrender would be appropriate only when the possibility of the opposition's surrender and peaceful settlement no longer exists. The gospel of Jesus Christ denies that this is ever the case until after the final judgment, when the war at last ends.

The Old Testament recognized the legitimacy of annihilation with respect to the Canaanites who dwelled in the Promised Land, but not to those dwelling outside the land. Canaanites were not supposed to be asked to surrender; they were to be asked either to abandon the land or die. The overriding issue here, however, was religion, not military strategy.

But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the

Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee: That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God (Deut. 20:16-18).

This military strategy was determined by the implacable religious warfare between the Hebrews and the local Canaanite cities. God refused to tolerate the gods of Canaan in the midst of Ancient Israel, so He required the policy of total annihilation.

His required policy for all other cities was different: the initial proclamation of the terms of surrender and the subsequent protection of the women and children of the defeated societies – a military policy based on the assumption that through marriage and adoption, foreign women and children could be assimilated into the nation of Israel (Deut. 21:10-13).

When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee. Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations (Deut. 20:10-15).

With the replacement of national Israel by the church (Matt. 21:42), Israel's post-Canaan military policy of killing all enemy adult males ceased, for the presence of the church as an international agency of adoption and reconciliation made the older strategy obsolete. This program of establishing a "fifth column" for Christ inside all enemy pagan nations was made possible by the resurrection itself.

The spiritual threat to covenant-keepers that had formerly been exercised by foreign local and national gods was drastically reduced by the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Christians are in principle "immunized" against evil gods, which is why they were allowed to eat meat previously offered to pagan idols even in the transitional era prior to the fall of Jerusalem (I Cor. 8). God has forever ended the Old Covenant dietary laws for believers (Acts 10).

God allowed the Roman army in A.D. 70 to impose the sanctions of Deuteronomy 20:10-15 on the now-apostate nation of Israel. This was the last biblically legitimate anni-

hilation in history. The national annual Passover and its required sacrifices ended forever. No longer are covenant-keeping believers required to return annually to Israel to participate in the Passover as God's specified means of retaining their ecclesiastical and national exclusiveness. Christians, as members of the New Covenant Israel, can live within foreign pagan nations and still retain their purity, both moral and ritual. Therefore, the separation of the regenerate wheat from the unregenerate tares is no longer to be accomplished by means of the sword (Matt. 13:24-38, 36-43), either militarily or domestically. In this respect, the medieval Islamic policy of conversion by military conquest was illegitimate; so was the Inquisition.

This change in covenantal administration forever altered biblical military strategy and domestic politics. The "search and destroy" strategy, which originally applied to whole societies (Canaan), and subsequently applied to the total adult male population of foreign cities, no longer is valid. It is not even valid for military units in their conflict with other units. Civilized men in arms are required to show mercy to those who surrender after the battle has begun. The West has adopted international rules governing the treatment of the wounded and prisoners of war. It is one of those predestinated ironies of history that these standards should be universally known as the Geneva Convention (1864, 1906).

Replacing Evil With Good

John Calvin, the senior pastor of Geneva, articulated the principles of New Covenant spiritual warfare in his comments on the Epistle of James: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:17-18). In the midst of the turmoil of the Protestant Reformation, Calvin wrote:

Hence James says, that those who are wise according to God's will, are so kind, meek, and merciful, as yet not to cover vices nor favour them; but on the contrary in such a way as to strive to correct them, and yet in a peaceable manner, that is, in moderation, so that union is preserved. And thus he testifies that what he had hitherto said tends in no degree to do away with calm reproofs; but that those who wish to be physicians to heal vices ought not to be executioners.

He therefore adds, *by those who make peace*; which ought to be thus explained: they who study peace, are nevertheless careful to sow righteousness; nor are they slothful or negligent in promoting and encouraging good works; but they moderate their zeal with the condiment of peace, while hypocrites throw all things into confusion by a blind and furious righteousness.¹

Is the peacemaker to be a "wimp for Jesus," to use today's terminology? Not at all. He is a person who will attempt neither to "cover vices nor favour them." He will "strive to correct them, and yet in a peaceable manner, that is, in moderation, so that union is preserved." This

also does not mean that he is either naive or blind to the fact that he can be thrown out of a stiffnecked, rebellious assembly, despite his attempts to preserve unity. Such was the fate of all Protestant Reformers. But, he insisted, the main goal is union: the preservation of peace during the period of reform.

What the peacemaker strives for is zeal moderated through good works. The peacemaker adds the **condiment of peace**, i.e., he adds good works to his challenge to the vices of the age. This is in line with James' insistence that sound theology is necessary but not sufficient for administering the healing salve brought by salvation:

For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? (James 2:13-22).

Living faith is healing faith, filled with good works. The devils have accurate theological knowledge but no saving faith.

Conclusion

James is clear on one point; so is Calvin: saving faith is publicly visible in the works of healing that God insists must accompany the surgery of orthodoxy. Without this, the patient—individuals, institutions, societies—will die from the severity of the operation. Calvin was emphatic: "... those who wish to be physicians to heal vices ought not to be executioners." To save the patient from unskilled theological surgeons, God reduces their influence and shrinks their clientele.

If contemporary Calvinists wonder why they have so little influence and such tiny congregations, here is why: they have paid so little attention to Calvin's theology of Christian reconstruction.

If those who announce their commitment to reconstructing the social order in terms of biblical principles continue to ignore the Epistle of James, they will find themselves in the wilderness, preaching to smaller audiences than John the Baptizer did. Footnotes are not enough. Neither are ballots.

If the depth of men's theology is not matched by the depth of their charitable giving, then their theology becomes, in Paul's words, sounding brass: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). James concurs: "Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." Let us leaven the loaf rather than burn it.

1. John Calvin, *Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, [1853] 1979), XXII, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, p. 328.