

ARISE & BUILD

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“THE PROBLEM IS US”

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY

Thus, the situation today is what it is not because we have social problems, nor because we have evil in our midst. The problem is that the godly are in retreat, retreat from action and therefore godliness. The problem is us.¹

~ R. J. Rushdoony



The Bible makes it very clear that man's problem is that he is a sinner. That message is so clear that the unregenerate attack Christianity as a weapon of control, and false teachers avoid it to focus on a supposedly “positive” message (complete with fake smiles) of a benefits-only pseudo-gospel of joy and blessings from a Sugar Daddy deity of their own imaginations that they blasphemously call “God.”

It is also clear that the Bible provides a remedy to our sin in the atonement of Jesus Christ. The first promise of salvation is in Genesis 3:15, just ten verses after Satan's temptation of Eve in 3:5. It is often called the *protoevangelium*, or the “first gospel.” From Genesis 3:15 forward the Bible is the history of God's salvation and thus the predominant theme of Scripture, so the “negativity” of sin is only significant if that overwhelmingly predominant offer and its historical development are ignored.

It is not just false teachers who pervert Scripture. It can and has been done by those within the evangelical camp as well. They reduce the claims of Christ to the “simple gospel” of salvation from hell to eternal life. Too often they ignore the importance of a Christian life between conversion and death.

THE COMMANDMENTS ARE NOT GRIEVOUS

When John wrote (in I John 5:3) that love was keeping God's commandments and that they were not grievous (heavy, or a burden), he was speaking about an aspect of God's provision on how we were to push back sin. The apostle was talking about the way of the redeemed man, the Christian life. The atonement was the means of our *justification* (declaration of righteousness) in the court of a just God, but obedience to the every Word of God was the way of our *sanctification* (growth in grace). Too often, obedience is thought of only as the “leading of the Spirit,” a vague, subjective standard. It is very easy for men to convince themselves that something is “of the Lord” when it clearly violates His revelation. It is no accident that horrendous evils have been perpetrated by this non-Scriptural but pious-sounding standard. This separation of Christian life and faith was made possible, in part, by a dualistic separation of Christianity from the world into a “spiritual,” otherworld plane. That is a very ancient but non-Christian idea. In the Bible, the “spiritual” represents that which is of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who was given to empower the Kingdom of God. The Spirit of God can never lead contrary to the Word of the Triune God. To understand what is

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spiritual, therefore, we look to the Word. Francis Schaeffer asked the right question of those who profess Jesus Christ: How should we then live?²² Our answer should be “in terms of the whole counsel of God,” or, as our Lord said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). John was the same apostle who reminded the church that such obedience was not a burdensome standard in I John 5:3. Our moral problems, individually and collectively, come from disobedience to God. Our redemption resolves the curse of death (ultimately in the resurrection) and our obedience hinders the development of the problems of this life caused by violating God’s moral absolutes.

VINES, NOT OAKS

A recurring image in Scripture is of the grape vine. Israel was said to be a choice vine that God planted in Canaan. The purpose of using a grape vine becomes obvious as this analogy is developed in Scripture. A more impressive image for Israel could have been selected, but the vine was chosen because its single utility was that of bearing fruit. Trees like the oak or the cedars of Lebanon had multiple uses. This fact became significant in a parable of Ezekiel 15.

The vine’s only purpose was to bear fruit. A vine that no longer bore fruit or that was diseased was removed. Its wood had no commercial value. A small piece of some trees (like oaks), Ezekiel noted, could be made into a dowel and used as a strong pin. A vine had no utility other than producing fruit. Its only usefulness, if we can call it that, was to build a fire. Its consumption in the fire served to prevent the growth of any disease to the new vines that would replace them. The primary purpose of this burning was therefore the destruction of the vine.

Ezekiel does not mention fruitfulness in his parable because he was talking to exiles from Judea during their captivity in Babylon. His audience knew the analogy of a vine referred to the nation (it was already an old usage); the absence of any mention of fruit was obviously because

judgment had fallen on the nation as their own status as exiles in Mesopotamia made perfectly clear. Ezekiel begins with useless vines, fit only for burning.

WHAT GOOD IS A CHARRED, DEAD VINE?

Judah still barely survived, however. Its judgment was not complete. The northern ten tribes had been taken captive over a century earlier, and Jerusalem had capitulated to Babylon, which resulted in the “brain-drain” of early captives, capable, skilled men like Daniel then Ezekiel and his audience who were marched to Mesopotamia because they were of value to its government or economy. Judah and Jerusalem still hung on at this time, but Israel as a whole was largely burned by God’s judgment. So, Ezekiel provides a sad picture of Judah as God’s vineyard—it was a charred piece of dead vine. The prophet asks his audience to consider what a dead vine, now partially charred by burning, was good for. If the vine wood had no useful purpose before and was now partially burnt in a fire, its only useful function was as a starter for yet another fire. Jerusalem was, Ezekiel made clear, like a charred piece of firewood left in a campfire to be burned later. The prophet’s audience was being told by false prophets that their captivity would be brief and that they would be going back to Judah soon (Jeremiah 29:24-32). Ezekiel was very clear; Jerusalem was itself a charred vine, headed for complete destruction in the fire of God’s judgment (Ezek. 15:6).

Jerusalem was unrepentant to the day of its overthrow by Babylonian forces. In one of the saddest examples of lack of repentance, the survivors of that siege and destruction fled to Egypt against Jeremiah’s instruction and began offering incense to its gods. When Jeremiah rebuked them, they explicitly repudiated the prophet and condemned the worship of God as the source of all their troubles (Jer. 44:15-30).

Sin leads to judgment, never blessing. That was Jeremiah’s message to the Jews. That was Ezekiel’s message to the

exiles in Babylon, as well, so his work was to prepare them to be part of the remnant that would return and rebuild for the Messianic reign God had promised. A generation and a half later, a remnant did return, though even at the time of Jesus there were more Jews in Mesopotamia than in Palestine. God is longsuffering, but He will not bless men in their disobedience.

THE NEXT REFORMATION

My father, R. J. Rushdoony, began the modern theonomy movement in 1968 when he began preaching on God's law. These messages were later published as *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vol. I) in 1973. God's law was an even harder sale in 1968 than it is today. Why did he propose such a marked shift in modern Christian thought and practice? It was because he saw obedience as the only way of future blessing. The Protestant Reformation rightly focused on the doctrine of *justification* and it coalesced around agreement that it was the act of God's grace, not man's works or action, and was received by faith alone. That single clarification produced a profound effect on Christianity and the history of the West. What the Reformation never found common ground on, however, was the doctrine of sanctification, the growth of the believer in grace. My father believed it was by obedience, hence his emphasis on theonomy. He felt the Protestant movement veered into several forms of false *sanctification*, but that it could only come by *obedience* to God's law-word.³

The prophets of the Old Testament illustrate this emphasis. They spoke very little about what the people professed and much about how they lived and acted. The denunciations of their rebellion were largely just observations of their disobedience to the law of God. That is why Ezekiel's ministry was a particularly difficult one. He had to make them do an about-face from the life and practices of several generations. Their repentance necessitated a radical change in their behavior.

In our day, sanctification is seldom mentioned. It is a work of God in the believer, a process that takes discipline because God's ways are uncomfortable to our sinful inclination. Today, we want a quick and easy salvation, so we focus on God's *act* of justification and its benefit to us without emphasis on the walk of faith and the discipline of sanctification. We prefer the simple gospel and the subjective standards of pietistic "leading of the Spirit." If every man is free to follow what he subjectively believes is the leading of the Spirit, then there is no objective accountability. Obedience is then a private aspect of an inner faith. This implicit dualism is why many modern Christians question how James could dare to speak of "the perfect law of liberty" (1:25) or to declare "faith without works is dead" (2:26). The problem is not with James or his theology, but with us and our understanding of sanctification. Until we change, we are not ready to be the next remnant of God. It will take a theological shift equal in scope to the Reformation to accomplish that.

"YOU CAN'T SIN AND GET AWAY WITH IT."

Romans 1 describes the progressive moral degeneration of men and hence their culture in its flight from God and the reality of their accountability to Him. In that passage Paul makes very clear that rebellion is self-destructive. My father frequently quoted Proverbs 8:36, "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death."

I attended a Fundamentalist school for six years. Most of its teachers had attended Bob Jones University and sat under its founder, Bob Jones Sr. One of his oft-repeated admonitions they related to us was, "You can't sin and get away with it." God's moral law is as fixed as the laws of physics built into His creation—violating them leads to our hurt, and if we do not conform to them, our death.

We recognize the consequences of sin in the lives of individuals and in families destroyed by infidelity, substance

abuse, or violence. We see it in businesses, churches, schools and organizations that are torn apart by great sin. The effect of such sins do not end with their immediate effects, but extend outward until they are no longer personal, local problems but systemic cultural ones.

In recent decades Christians have become increasingly aware of the cultural destructiveness of the anti-Christian teaching of the government school system. This necessitated a turning from it to a distinctly Biblical alternative. Our world and life view must cause us to see rebellion against God, understand its consequences, and act accordingly. This action might involve large cultural initiatives, but it may only be possible to prepare as individuals, families, or small groups (such as churches).

Our currency is a form of theft. Our government steals the value of our currency by the same method used by counterfeiters—they make it at will and exchange what has no value for things of value. This theft is forced upon us by “legal tender” laws requiring us to accept it. We are currently riding a bubble of apparent prosperity made possible by this counterfeiting. All such fiat currencies end up worthless. We cannot control US monetary policy, but we can see the inevitability of its accountability and prepare ourselves to some extent. If we cannot rebuild or reconstruct, we must prepare for the coming implosion of our economic house of cards. In one area after another, we must see the future in terms of accountability to the moral law of God. “You can’t sin and get away with it.” We might not agree with Bob Jones Sr. on some points, but this is a very sound axiom to remember.

The Christian past was never perfect, but rather than reform it we have only repudiated it. Our Trinitarian Puritan tradition dissolved into a pietistic Unitarian humanism which then yielded to a Darwinian no-god, survival-of-the-fittest anarchism. Our only hope is repentance and revival. If that does not occur in our

culture and our nation it can still occur in us and our homes and churches. God did not need Israel, Jerusalem, or the temple to advance His work. He promised to raise up a remnant in their place. We will only be part of the continuing Kingdom of God and His Christ if we submit ourselves in faith and obedience to His Word.

It is not hard to see the cultural degradation around us. Ezekiel’s message to the Jewish captives in Babylon should be taken to heart: know why this has happened, do not repeat the sins of your fathers, repent and prepare yourselves and your children to be part of the remnant God will by grace use to advance His promises.

The problem of man is now, as it has been since Adam and Eve, sin, so it is us. One of the most blasphemous responses to evil is all too common: “How could a good God let this happen?” The question is how we could let this happen, because the problems we see are a result of sin. It is us, but by God’s regenerating grace, His Spirit allows us to arrest our moral degeneration and grow in sanctification, to be increasingly set apart to service rather than self-destruction. The regenerate man is the one who has repented of his sin and turned in faith and obedience to God. When the Holy Spirit regenerates men, His work is *efficacious*, that is, it has its intended effect. The regenerate man has a new heart as a new creature in Christ. When a new battery is put in a car, it is not to start and idle, but to make it a moving, useful vehicle. We too must be vehicles of God’s efficacious grace.

It is appropriate to be pessimistic about sinful man. He does make a mess of everything, but man is not in control and we must most emphatically deny that sinful men control the future. The power of God’s Spirit that regenerates men, families, and Christian assemblies can and will spread that life to the larger outworking of His Kingdom and its advance. Whatever man destroys the Spirit

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ONE BITE AT A TIME

BY ANDREA SCHWARTZ



There is a well-known expression: **Q:** How do you eat an elephant?

A: One bite at a time.

The meaning is obvious.

If you are going to tackle a big job or endeavor, you have to take it step by step. Attempting to get to the end result, without doing the intermediate steps ensures that even if you should get the result, many in-between components may get shortchanged. This is also true when playing the game of chess. While being able to think many moves ahead is valuable, one must play each move in order to proceed with one's ultimate strategy of winning the game.

Why would we think it any different with the dominion mandate? God told Adam and Eve that they should be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. When the couple was confronted with an appealing, *alternative* strategy for achieving desired results, they rejected the God-ordained rules/steps that would lead to success and favor with God. Instead, they plummeted themselves and their posterity (us) into sin, making the entire process something other than what the original task would have been. The deciding factor was disobedience.

Because too many people think of work as a curse rather than part of the dominion mandate, anything that has to do with work is often deemed negative. I would venture that most who read the Fourth Commandment think of it primarily as a commandment to rest; yet it is every bit as much a work commandment, since a complete reading specifies six days of work prior to resting from our labors. Unlike the foolish decision of our first parents, who believed they knew better than God how to execute their work, we who have been born again in the Spirit have the benefit of knowing the history of man's disobedience to God

and the benefit of adhering to God's Holy Word. Now we can embrace godly work on God's terms rather than shun it. This is what the dominion mandate is all about—doing the work of the Kingdom according to the law-word of God.

God did not give Adam and Eve an impossible task to perform. In their sinless state, godly dominion was very doable. He gave them all the resources they would need to develop the Garden of Eden as a pilot project to be replicated in the entire earth. They just had to tackle their "elephant" one bite at a time. And, I submit, that it is the same with us. The dominion tasks that we are called to do, do not involve anything that God has not equipped His children to perform. The problem arises when we are dissatisfied with the obvious mundane tasks in front of us that will result in dominion, and desire to do more glamorous works or work that will earn a greater round of applause from those we deem to be our audience. If we fail to see that the primary audience *is* and *will remain* the Lord, we'll experience frustration and bail out of our task or calling before we achieve His desired results.

LEARNING DOMINION

Since I embraced the concept and duties of Christian Reconstruction, I have had to learn patience and perseverance when it came to the many tasks God has called me to do. You might wonder how I knew I was truly hearing from Him. In the most obvious way, since I was a wife and mother, my dominion tasks were going to be family-focused and proceed from that context. There were other times, though, when I felt compelled to add to my dominion tasks and had to learn whether I was legitimately hearing from God. This took practice and discernment. When I ran some of my ideas past my husband and

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others at Chalcedon, sometimes I didn't get the positive response I was hoping for. It would have been easy to just abandon them, but it was at these times when I learned which ones to hold on to and which to let go. In many cases, the result of prayer encouraged me that the seed still needed to mature. Much like a pregnancy takes time, often my ideas needed to germinate and develop. Allowing God's timetable to prevail rather than my own allowed me to think ahead to what important pieces needed to be put into place to make my idea become a reality. So long as I kept seeking God's guidance and the prompting of the Holy Spirit kept the fire alive, I worked to get consensus and support.

I knew I was on the right track when others I had pitched my ideas to made the very same suggestions to me, often times forgetting I had presented the ideas in the first place. This served as a confirmation that I should proceed with the necessary steps. Seeing the various projects through was rewarding, but mostly it was a sense that I had responded to God's call, and had seen His assignment through to completion. Yes, relief was present, but I always had an expectation that now I was ready for my next assignment.

OVERCOMING HURDLES

Sometimes God called me to tutor students other than my own children. I had to be patient through their learning process, as I had not been the one to raise them. I had to learn who my students were in order to serve them better. I also had to be patient when they were a half an hour late to sessions because their parent had misjudged her schedule. I discovered that in many cases, the parents were somewhat clueless in terms of their responsibilities under God. This meant that I had to "tutor" them in a non-threatening, winsome manner.

One time I had to secure another venue for a Chalcedon event, when two weeks prior to it the contracted venue stated they didn't want to host us, as we

were too controversial. I could go on, but I think you get the point. Once I embraced that God is responsible for the outcome and I am responsible for my faithfulness, the process became more satisfying. Notice I didn't say it became easier, because that was not always the case. Obedience doesn't guarantee calm waters. Sometimes it means the boat might just capsize. Again, the outcome is in the hands of the Lord.

EDUCATION

Currently my mind is flooded with ideas as to how to get more Christian families to secure a Christian education for their children, either by convincing the parents that they can successfully home-school or help those who have limited resources and educational skills have their children attend a solid, Christian school.

There are many hurdles to jump in order to get this to happen. I need qualified candidates, willing sponsors, and the patience to overcome trivial and genuine obstacles. Being a constant student of the Bible is vital. By learning of the trials and temptations to quit of our forebears in the faith, I can more readily hang-in-there when things get cumbersome and frustrating. You'd be amazed at just how mundane most dominion work is. Staying the course has more to do with believing that our Lord is truly the King of kings and Lord of lords than it does with immediate success. In fact, reviewing the history of our great cloud of witnesses helps cement the perspective that we will not always see the fruits of our labors.

LEARNING I DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING

God has impressed upon me the need to reach out to brothers and sisters in the faith who might not have the exact same theological perspectives. One thing this Covid-19 era has demonstrated to me is that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. I have found more in common with those I may have previously dismissed, simply because I find more genuine fellowship with their desire to obey God in the midst of statist threats

and mandates. Dominion then involves sharing with them how much they actually do agree with theonomy and the need to reconstruct our society on the basis of the law-word of God.

THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

Because I firmly believe that there is much still to accomplish in pursuing godly dominion, I know that faithful families must be a part of the equation. But how will committed Christians find each other? Here is where being faithful has everything to do with success.

Years ago when I ran out of children to homeschool, I began writing books to help Christian families. As a result, I began doing studies from Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* with women in my locale and online across the world. My students were women who wanted to learn the law-word of God to be better able to impart it to their children. Now, over a decade later, some of them (at my prodding) have established contact with each other, introducing their children to each other, and some marriages have resulted.

So, add to my dominion work the pleasure of introducing women and men who wish to begin families, establishing them on a firm foundation in Biblical law and faithfulness. I joke that they should name their first-borns after me, but I'm just thrilled that geographical location has not become an impossible hurdle for couples to find each other.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

One of the passages in Scripture that is always at the forefront of my mind is from the book of Ecclesiastes, where the Preacher says, "Hear the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." This is the prescription for dominion. Notice that it isn't an optional piece of advice, but a mandate in the truest sense of the word.

All of us have dominion work that is suited specifically to the talents, abilities, and circumstances God has provided.

Where the spirit is willing, the flesh will be strong. And, if you need any encouragement along the way, I'm ready and willing to help guide you. The only requirement is that you believe, without question, that God has given you a job that He has created especially for *you!* 🏠

M. Rushdoony, The Problem Is Us, cont...

can remake into something far more glorious and productive.

We are on the Lord's side and are therefore on the forefront of the certain advance of His Kingdom. 🏠

1. R. J. Rushdoony, *A Word in Season* Vol. 5 (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2014) p. 9.
2. Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976).
3. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, [1973] 2020) p. 4.



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Our objective is to help equip Christians to “take back” government from the state by means of Biblical self-government and to apply their faith to every sphere of life and thought. We’ve already

gained significant ground through helping to restore Christian education, but it’s time to move into other spheres by God’s grace, law, and power.

We desperately need your help to continue this mission, so please take a few moments today to prayerfully consider supporting Chalcedon with your tax-deductible giving. We’ve enclosed a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope to make it easy, and you can also donate online at:

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