

ARISE & BUILD

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THE VICTORY OF TRUTH

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE



In a world awash in lies, it can be challenging to think of the future as a time when truth will triumph in history. Lies and falsehoods fuel the kingdom of man, providing the cover under which humanism operates. In order to maintain the façade of absolute, godlike sovereignty, modern states exert control over what is and is not truth. A god cannot err, so history and facts are accordingly rearranged by the state to ensure that its infallibility is maintained. George Orwell's depiction of a Ministry of Truth makes clear that such manipulation is structured so that the state may remain absolute. Nothing is off the table in propping up the state as the god of a culture.

Orwell saw the *state* as the institution that turned truth into a pliable asset to be placed under its direct control. Spin doctors and those who “control the narrative” bend and warp the truth, but the state has no monopoly here. When social media giants block stories that they regard as unflattering or harmful to their cause, they impose an additional layer of control beyond the state.

It'd be tempting to point fingers at secularists who, in Nietzsche's words, seek to “seize control of explanation itself.”¹ But Christian scholarship suffers the effects of blackballing and suppression even within its own ranks.² Christians are hypocrites to criticize secular conduct while hiding their own dirty laundry. Humanists suppress truth because they can, and Christians do so for the same reason.

Each Orwellian Ministry of Truth determining “all the news that's fit to print” is doomed: they labor in vain that try to build and maintain such vanities. Once we sweep aside their pretense of relevance, we can renew our confidence that truth will triumph in history. The ocean of lies, not God's truth, will be flushed down the memory hole.

Pilate tried to bat away Christ's claims by countering with “What is truth?”³ Pilate was more honest than today's humanists, who want to sneak “truth” back into their worldviews. Note how anti-Christian novelist Philip Pullman⁴ provides for a plot device called an alethiometer (from *aletheia*, Greek for truth). The alethiometer “tells the truth,” and by the end of Pullman's trilogy God is exposed and overthrown as a big lie. It wasn't enough to depose Truth Incarnate: Pullman needed another source of truth to fill the vacuum.

EVERY MAN A LIAR

It is always tempting to quote Romans 3:4 as a rejoinder.⁵ “Let God be true but every man a liar” is one of the keys to dismantling every pretended Ministry of Truth designed to guard man's “refuge of lies” (Isa. 28:15). Paul's point clears the way for the victory of God's truth in this world, because His Word will never return to Him void (Isa. 55:11, cf. Isa. 45:22–23).

Romans 3:4 concludes by quoting from Psalm 51:4:

God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings,

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and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

John Murray explains the significance of Paul's quotation:

[Paul] has been making emphatic protestation to the effect that the unbelief of men does not bring to nought the faithfulness of God. The appeal to David's confession provides him with the strongest kind of confirmation. For David had said that sin, since it is against God, vindicates and establishes God's justice. If sin does not disestablish the *justice* of God, neither can man's faithlessness and untruth make void the *faithfulness* and *truth* of God. God must be true though every man be a liar.⁶

There is eloquent progression here. It is not simply in the face of the fact that some do not believe (vs. 3) that God's faithfulness is inviolate. Even if all men were liars God's truth remains unmoved (cf. Psalm 100:5).⁷

C. H. Irwin expands on Paul's meaning:

The promises of God will be fulfilled, even though there are some who do not believe on them. The Law of God will assert its claims, even though there are some who repudiate them ... *God's faithfulness is not affected by the unbelief of his own people.* (Italics in original.)⁸

Sanday and Headlam concur that Paul declares the Most High to be "guiltless in respect to the promises which He has fulfilled, though man will not believe in their fulfillment."⁹

Moisés Silva draws attention to the same theme in similar words:

Nevertheless, the purposes of the Creator, who is also the Savior, cannot be thwarted by human weakness.¹⁰

We must refuse to walk by sight, holding fast to the truth that God's revealed purposes cannot be thwarted. As Murray noted, "God is not determined in His purposes or in His promises by what is extraneous to Himself or to His will."¹¹

In his discussion of Romans 3:4, R. J. Rushdoony cites from Gifford's exposition at length:

God's truth is absolute and independent;

it cannot be impaired, even if man's foolishness be universal ... Truth must be ascribed to God, and none but God.¹²

Consider the relative quantity of unbelievers/liars in the preceding verse, Romans 3:3. In English, we tend to think of a small proportion when reading that "some did not believe." But Gifford teaches otherwise:

It is to be remarked that "*some*" in the original signifies a part of the whole, but not necessarily a small part. It may be a very great part and majority of the whole,—as in Hebrews 3:16, where it is said, "Some when they heard provoked, howbeit not all that came out of Egypt with Moses." All did provoke God on that occasion except Joshua and Caleb, and those who were still too young to bear arms ... (Chalmers).¹³

Just as massive unbelief prevailing in the past had *absolutely no effect* on God's promises, so too does unbelief today have no bearing on whether the truth will conquer the world.

Accordingly, we must not only walk by faith (rather than by sight) but we must also not walk in unbelief and in concert with those who reject the certainty that the gospel will conquer. Let God be true, but every man a liar on account of their unbelief.

DON'T THE WICKED HOLD ALL THE CARDS?

King David said, "I have seen the wicked in great power" (Psa. 37:35). Too many Christians leave the matter there, but the verses before and after that observation point out that the wicked will lose all their power in time and history, and that God's faithful people will see them and their plans come to nothing.

When we argue that world conditions and present wickedness must determine our assessment of the future, we effectively call God a liar. Isaiah asserted that "the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance" (Isa. 40:15). Moreover, "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than noth-

ing” (Isa. 40:17). Dust on the balance that’s less than nothing—this means we need to see the nations as impotent, as incapable of having any impact whatsoever on the course of events. To imagine differently is to imagine a vain thing (Psa. 2:1).

THE WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY

Too many Christians also adopt the enemy’s position that history embodies a principle of inevitability . . . a principle effectively outside of God’s control and counsel. This is why we increasingly hear the phrase that someone “is on the wrong side of history.” This is an appeal to the current flow of history as determining right and wrong. The future is appealed to as judge over today’s policy-making. The intent behind the phrase is to shame people to go with the flow, rather than to be seen by future generations as reactionaries impeding supposed moral progress.

Those who only care about their reputations don’t want to find themselves on the wrong side of history. Those submitted to God should reject such argumentation. As Rushdoony noted, “Sometimes faithfulness to God, being in step with the Lord, requires us to be out of step with other people.”¹⁴

Remember that *nobody* was more on the wrong side of history than Christ, and He changed all subsequent history. Such reversals aren’t uncommon. In music, Johann Sebastian Bach was on the wrong side of history too, but he divided musical history in half and is a perpetual presence in the second half.¹⁵ Following the multitude and deifying the flow of events is a formula for irrelevance—because emulating the dust of the balance that’s less than nothing is folly.

Today’s oft-shouted refrain is “the whole world is watching!”—which is intended to be the truth all must bow down to and submit to, or else. But we know that it is God who is watching, and He still sees even after Twitter blocks its feeds.

TRUTH AND VICTORY

Note the relationship between truth and victory in how Jesus Christ interprets Messianic prophecy. According to Isaiah 42:3, He shall lead justice to truth. When Christ quotes this prophecy (Matt. 12:20) concerning Himself, He changes the last word: He shall lead justice to victory. *Truth* in Isaiah becomes *victory* in Matthew. Jesus Christ is *uniting* the two concepts: victory is bound up in the Biblical conception of truth as it touches upon the expansion of Christ’s rule over the world from the right hand of the Father.

Isaiah’s conception of leading justice to truth is crucial here. Christ establishes justice “in truth” because “by every other mode of dealing, justice would be established *in appearance* and *outwardly* only.”¹⁶ Humanism only delivers the *appearance* of *outward* justice, founded upon sand. Because “the isles wait for His law” (Isa. 42:4), the victory established in the truth will be a total one, not a superficial, fragile one.

DON’T FOCUS ON GOD’S INSTRUMENTS

Christians are prone to discount the idea of gospel victory. First, they believe the task is too difficult and the world too far gone. Common sense dictates rejecting such optimism (just as the common-sense Sadducees rejected the resurrection of the dead). But the Scriptures don’t permit us to elevate the creature over the Creator, so pessimists try another argument: the church isn’t qualified to evangelize the world. It is comprised of weak and flawed people who couldn’t possibly turn the world upside-down again.

But 1 Corinthians 3:7 alerts us to *not focus on God’s chosen instruments*.

So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

Focusing on the credentials of those who plant and water is *meaningless*, because *they are nothing* (are not the determining factor).

We love that final verse about God giving the increase, but the more closely we examine Paul's statement, the more we realize that *any focus upon the instruments* is foolish. At no point are the results contingent on their qualifications. Paul has outright asserted that *he is nothing, and Apollos is nothing*. Modern Christians aren't nearly so humble, so pessimists they remain.

Our eyes should not be upon God's enemies (though they be numerous and powerful), or upon the greatness of the task (to justify folding our hands in defeat). Our eyes should not be upon ourselves. These are all weights to be set aside (Heb. 12:1) so that we can look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). If you look to Jesus, you can see only the certainty of victory. Look to the world of men, and you will sink in the slough of despond.

Pessimists think themselves wise analysts and realists. Our model, however, is Abraham. He refused to consider two things that *we* consider fatal objections: his dead body and Sarai's dead womb (Rom. 4:19). "He staggered not at the promise of God" (v. 20). We must stand with Abraham and not stagger at God's promises for this world. No other considerations matter. Even if "truth is fallen in the street" (Isa. 59:14) and "truth faileth" (v. 15), God will unfailingly act (vv. 16–21).

In his commentary on Corinthians (forthcoming), R. J. Rushdoony says this:

In 1 Cor. 4:3, "by man's judgment" is in the Greek literally "by man's day." God has His Judgment Day at the end of history, but sinful man passes judgment daily on his fellow men.

Paul's use of "the day of man" as against "the day of the Lord" is very telling. The prevailing power of "the day of man" all too often governs the church. It is this humanistic judgment, that men fear and move in terms of, which is a very great sin. "The day of man" is a continuous backbiting judgment by men on one another, whereas God's great day is at the end of history. A present-oriented

people will serve "the day of man" and live in fear of its judgments. Paul's total trust is in the Day of the Lord. "The day of man" is all around us, but it is a trivial matter as against the Day of the Lord.¹⁷

Nonetheless, "the day of man" will fade away in history because "the darkness is passing away" (1 John 2:8) and every knee *shall* bow (Isa. 45:22–23). We will one day see many a "city of truth" (Zech. 8:3) living according to Zechariah 8:16:

These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates.

Lies and tumult have no future because they contain the seeds of their own destruction. The people of God will cling to the truth against all opposing considerations because Christ is Truth Incarnate, and the ultimate victory of truth will be absolute and total before He returns. 🏰

1. Robert Erwin, *The Great Language Panic and Other Essays in Cultural History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), p. 69.
2. The treatment of Dr. Greg Bahnsen remains an ugly cautionary tale in this regard, while Dr. Michael McVicar carefully documented *Christianity Today's* concerted suppression (well before Twitter or Facebook existed) of R. J. Rushdoony, cf. <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/working-with-pygmyies-r-j-rushdoony-christianity-today-and-the-making-of-an-american-theologian>.
3. See the excellent discussion of this in Ron Kronz, *Fighting to Win (and other things I didn't learn in Sunday School)* (Self-published, 2020, ISBN 9798645681418), p. 40.
4. See Lee Duigon's perceptive review of Pullman's trilogy at <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/satanism-for-young-readers-a-review-of-his-dark-materials>. HBO is currently churning out its own version of the trilogy to finish what the 2007 movie version, *The Golden Compass*, began.
5. The most memorable rejoinder citing Romans 3:4 appears in Greg Bahnsen, "The Prima Facie Acceptability of Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* Vol. 3, No. 2, [Winter 1976–77], p. 54.
6. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 95.
7. *ibid.*, n.2.
8. H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, ed., *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.), vol. 18, sec. 2, p. 89.
9. William Sanday, Arthur C. Headlam, *The*
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WALKING BY FAITH WHEN WE SEE ONLY PROBLEMS

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY

For we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Cor. 5:7)



How do we walk by faith? Even Paul had just referred (2 Cor. 4) to darkness, troubles, perplexity, persecution, death, and affliction.

He could “see” the obvious. The apostle acknowledged the very real problems he and others faced in preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, which to most in the Roman Empire was irrelevant, if not nonsense. He walked by faith, but he did in fact see the troubles swirling around his ministry.

To “walk by faith” does not preclude us from using our sight. To use a common expression, Paul could “not help but notice” the obvious. When we hear this admonition to “walk by faith,” we must never assume it means we are to be oblivious to the obvious that we observe “by sight.” The Greek word *walk* Paul uses refers literally to “walking at large,” or figuratively to how he lived or deposed himself. He had already revealed his frame of reference a few lines earlier when he contrasted the “seen” as temporal versus things “not seen” as eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).

WHAT DO WE SEE?

When we observe our world we see one mess after another. It is well that we recognize that man in sin does make a mess of things. It is necessary to see the world and people as they are. The Bible gives us no reason to have illusions of man’s goodness. The sins and failures of even its saints are clearly laid out. Paul was pointing us to his worldview perspective. He could not help but see the problems of confronting the unbelieving world with the claims of the gospel and he knew

what he experienced was “pushback.” His statement was that he lived in terms of his faith, his worldview of the eternal.

We are not lacking faith if we see and address the problems of our day. Ours is only a weak faith if we live or deport ourselves in terms of such temporal matters rather than our faith. Our faith in what God is doing must give us perspective and direction.

In the mid-1970s my father noted that men’s faith in salvation by politics was making them impatient with the failures of government to create the wonderful future they promised in each campaign. He suggested it would lead to more one-term administrations.

He was partly right in that neither Ford nor Carter were re-elected. The impatience he noted has since turned into a very divisive political climate which now seems to have permanently entered every area of society. Our country is in a civil war, though thankfully without armed conflict.

We would be foolish to ignore the issues of our day that are obvious to any observer. Our challenge is to “see,” or understand these issues in terms of our faith, and to live and deport ourselves in terms of the eternal issues rather than just the temporal ones. Paul had temporal needs and concerns that were very real, as do we. His faith did not require him to ignore or dismiss problems, but to understand them; he had to see issues in terms of the world and life view his faith in Christ gave him.

THE END OF THE AGE OF STATISM

My father frequently referred to our current crisis as the end of an age. The post-Enlightenment world, he felt, had

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run its course and the age of humanism and its statism was, so to speak, running on empty. Its death throes would be violent and dangerous, but it was nearing an end. We see one area of our civilization after another in disarray: law, politics, currency, morals, education, the arts, and more. The problems cross national borders.

Within the United States, we have political chaos. Whoever emerges the victor in the presidential election by the time you read this, will, next year and thereafter face more political dogfighting. The political campaign will continue. When I was in high school it was common to hear comparisons of the U.S. to the Roman Empire in its decline. That was typically a reference to the moral decline of America and its “bread and circuses” welfare mentality, but it is now more analogous to compare the current treachery within Washington, D.C., to the murderous plots for control of the imperial throne during its latter stages of decline.

Humanism has run its course and the bright future liberalism promised as late as the 1960s now seems transparently impossible. But you cannot merely remove a philosophical worldview and expect a void to rule the day. Humanism must be replaced by something else. Walking by faith will lead us to see clearly that the “something” our world needs is the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven.

There is little common ground in our culture. Fifty years or more ago it was a truism that one could only talk with strangers about sports and the weather. Now those options are gone. Sports have gone from tribal-like loyalty to symbols of political correctness and “woke” thought. Discussions of the weather now revolve around the political cause of “climate change.”

Humanism has not united mankind, because it cannot. The words *common*, *community*, and *communion* are related. In order to have *community* there must be a *communion*, something in *common*. There is precious little we now have in

common that binds us as a people. Both Darwinism and Marxism have embedded the idea of an inescapable “conflict of interests” into the modern mind. All of life and relationships are now seen as a dog-eat-dog struggle for control, race vs. race, men vs. women, labor vs. management, children vs. parents, haves vs. have nots, etc. Modern man is now paranoid about what others are doing to him, and that irrational fear causes him to feel justified in “doing unto others before they do unto you.” We no longer even agree on a common history, as history has been taught as a social science to ideologically manipulate recent generations. References to history are now only made to cut off appeals to the past by a condemnation for evils real or imagined. Without a communion based on a common faith, there can be no community, so the next four years will see disunity and conflict. With no moral standard in a common faith, every man will do that which is “right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). That is not just a reference to moral lawlessness. We must take the statement that they were right in their “own eyes” at face value. Every lawless (by a righteous standard) man believed in the certainty of his own virtue and stood proudly in terms of it. It is describing a proud, self-righteous lawlessness, much like our own situation. Satan offered Adam and Eve the power of making their own decisions over “good and evil” (Gen. 3:5) determinative. All sin seeks to establish itself as the legitimate norm.

THE LUST FOR POWER

The problem with politics is that it is the means to acquire and maintain power in our statist culture. An alternative means to power is wealth (also subject to great abuse), but politics attracts those without even the real skills to develop power by legitimately creating wealth. It attracts those whose only ability is demagoguery.

Politics (often in the form of political correctness, a form of censorship) now controls the media, entertainment,

courts, academia, and most recently, sports. It is seen as a vehicle to establish one's power over others, so it increasingly dominates every aspect of our lives to define justice, rights, progress, and freedom. Now even religious groups are being ordered to conform.

THE ALTERNATIVE TO SALVATION BY POLITICS

Our culture is dysfunctional because statist humanism is failing, just like Rome's corruption and infighting hastened its weakness and eventual collapse. It was replaced by Christendom, but that took centuries. When a system collapses, one must exist to take its place or a dangerous void exists. The authoritarianism of the Soviet Union collapsed but was only replaced by another authoritarian regime and corrupt, crony capitalism.

The alternative to political salvation is salvation by Jesus Christ and the making of all things new (Rev. 21:5; Isa. 65:17; 43:19). This was the faith of which Paul spoke. The Kingdom of God involves all that is in heaven and earth and is associated with power, glory, and victory (1 Chron. 29:11). The model of the kingdom in the old covenant was the kingdom of Israel, but the reality now is the Kingdom of God (or Heaven), where the reign of God (Isa. 52:7) is now represented by the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The Kingdom of God was announced by John (Matt. 3:2) and preached by Jesus after Herod's attempt to silence him (Mark 1:14; Matt. 4:17). Jesus said this gospel of the Kingdom would go forward despite the coming judgment on Jerusalem, the apostate center of the old covenant model (Matt 24:14). Citizenship in the Kingdom of God was by the new birth, or regeneration (John 3:5) based on the redemption purchased by our Lord's atonement (1 Cor. 1:13–14). Therefore, we are to seek, before all else, that Kingdom and the righteousness commanded by God (Matt. 6:33), and that duty means we must, as good citizens, obey its commandments (Matt. 5:19).

We should look around us and truly see the end of the age of humanistic statism. The coming years will likely be unpleasant in many respects, but the change is necessary. The first Christians lived through the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. A later generation lived through the fall of Rome itself. The problems presented in our day seem, at this point, small in comparison. The crises of history come and go, but the Kingdom of God survives and grows. This process continues. We do not have the advantage of foresight to see exactly how the crises of our day will play out, but our eschatology must point us to the certainty that all will resound to the glory of God and His Christ. His Kingdom will advance and know no end, and we are heirs with Christ of its eternal glories (1 Cor. 6-9:10, c.f. Rom. 8:14-19). 🙌

Selbrede "The Victory of Truth" continued...

Epistle to the Romans (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 72.

10. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids, MI: [1994] 2007), p. 293.

11. Murray, op. cit., p. 95. Murray further asserts that "the unbelief of Jews does not disestablish the truth and abiding validity of God's oracles" (p. 94).

12. R. J. Rushdoony, *Romans and Galatians* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1997), p. 37, citing E. H. Gifford in Cook's commentary. Rushdoony provides data for the original 1881 London printing, but it is far more readily available today in the 1981 reprint by Baker, thus: F. C. Cook, *The Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: [1871–1881] 1981), vol. 9, p. 83. The following endnote, which goes beyond Rushdoony's citation, references this Baker reprint as "Gifford, op. cit."

13. Gifford, op. cit., p. 83. See end note above.

14. R. J. Rushdoony, *A Word in Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life*, Vol. 7 (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2016), p. 39.

15. <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/johann-sebastian-bach-a-model-for-christian-excellence>

16. Ernest Wilhelm Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (Mac Dill AFB, FL: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), Vol. 1, p. 543.

17. R. J. Rushdoony, *Commentary on 1st and 2nd Corinthians* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2021), loc. cit.



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