

PUTTING ON THE BELT OF TRUTH IN A POST- TRUTH WORLD

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Oxford Dictionaries added the word "post-truth" to its pages in 2016 after the word's usage increased 2,000% over the year before (when "selfie" was added, appropriately enough).

The BBC explained: "[Post-truth] is defined as an adjective relating to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential... than emotional appeals." *Oxford Dictionaries'* Casper Grathwohl noted at the time: "I wouldn't be surprised if post-truth becomes one of the defining words of our time." Or even one of its defining ideas.

The Trouble with Truth

Our prevailing culture finds truth—objective truth—problematic, but to affirm *your* truth is broadly accepted. "Feel free to hold to a truth," it implies, "a *personal* truth, so long as it's *yours*. (And so long as your truth is not imposed on *me*.)"

The problem with this subjective approach to truth is it shape-shifts with every personal impulse. It has no moral center. Instead, it leans heavily on human emotion and opinion to determine what's right and wrong. For Christians, post-truth is not just a slipshod moral compass; it's *anti-biblical*.

All of Scripture extols the virtue, the perfection, and the sufficiency of the Bible. (Yes, God's Word is allowed to be self-referential because it's *God's*

Word.) At the same time, Scripture confirms we sinners are incapable of arriving at the truth on our own. Psalm 36:9 recognizes this reality, saying, "In your light do we see light." We're hopelessly blind to God's lightning-bright truth, absent the Holy Spirit's illumination.

First Things First

Thank God then—*really, thank God!*—he doesn't keep us in the dark. His revealed truth is written in black and white, and his Word equips Christians to resist the lies of this fallen world.

Ephesians 6:11-14a instructs us:

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth...."

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God wants us to know that we have a real enemy, the scheming devil, who wants nothing more than to impress people into his system of lies. Post-truth is one in a long line of them.

Paul then places the armor of God in its proper context: a spiritual war between God and evil "cosmic powers." He acknowledges the devil's age-old subversion of truth, telling his first-century readers to put on the "belt of truth" *first*.

But taking inventory of the *whole armor of God*, is the belt the first thing that comes to mind? I tend to think sword. Or for defense, a shield, helmet, or breastplate. But not a belt.

Gucci and "Gird Up Your Loins"

Paul is not talking about a fashion statement here; there were no Gucci belts in first-century Ephesus. So, please permit me to get a bit old school for a moment. The *King James Bible* says, "Gird up your loins." Which sounds a bit weird to our 21st-century Western ears!

However, to Paul's original audience, it meant one of two things: you were either preparing to work or *preparing for war*. It meant gathering your robe and tucking it into your belt so you were unencumbered.

Further, the belt was essential to a soldier's tactical gear. Among other things, it helped support his breastplate and held his sword in place.

To extend the metaphor, the "belt of truth"—God's inerrant Word—is the centerpiece of a Christian's spiritual armor. Without it, we lose our footing, and other gear is rendered ineffective. Take, for instance, the "shield of faith" (Eph. 6:16a). *Faith without the ballast of biblical truth is empty*. Even Christians get tripped up when they place faith in something unbiblical and ultimately untrue. Without truth, we would have a flimsy shield against the "flaming darts of the evil one (Eph. 6:16b)."

Upside-down Eden

Satan doesn't fight like a gentleman (in case the whole "flaming darts" thing didn't give it away). And spiritual battle isn't like an 18th-century duel. There's no scheduling a mutually convenient time for a face-to-face show-down. Nope, Satan *ambushes* us, most often when we're war-weary and depleted.

Perhaps there's no greater biblical example of this than Jesus' wilderness temptation (See Matt. 4:1-11). After Jesus has fasted 40 days and nights, alone in a desert wasteland, Satan, "the tempter," enters the scene. Observe: Satan's tactics haven't changed since the Garden of Eden.

The Bible tells us Jesus is hungry at this point, and we can assume physically spent. Knowing this, Satan's first temptation is for Jesus to turn rocks into bread to satisfy his gnawing hunger. When Jesus doesn't take the bait, Satan raises the stakes on the temptations until, at last, Satan offers Jesus a worldly kingdom... if only Jesus will grovel before him.

"It is Written"

Jesus' response to Satan is instructive for us today. His rebuttal? The Spirit-breathed Word of truth, starting with three charged words: "It is written."

In a very real sense then, *Jesus spoke truth to power*—an expression that's been repeated over the past few years as people call for justice. Originally attributed to 20th-century Quaker activists, "speaking truth to power" means appealing to those in authority to carry out justice. To do the right thing for the good of society.

But the phrase is shaken loose of meaning in a post-truth society. When the truth is a function of popular opinion and corruptible power brokers, there's no hope for lasting justice regarding the injustices of racism, sexism, and abuse, to name just a few. "Speaking truth to power" becomes nothing more than replacing someone else's personal bias with my own.

Speaking Truth to Power

Christians, however, have a singular advantage. When we're weak, tempted, and tried, we can stand—as Jesus did—on biblical, not-a-matter-of-personal-opinion truth.

And when we see our fellow travelers similarly harassed, we can light their path with the lantern of God's good and gracious truth. And, we can lift their cause to the incorruptible, all-powerful King of kings!

So as we battle on, we find the "belt of truth" embraces and encircles us. "[It] is your foundation garment," says Iain Duguid. "Put it on; wear it; be found in it day and night—for in Christ that truth will set you free from the grip of Satan's powerful lies."¹

1. IAIN DUGUID, *THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD* (WHEATON, IL, CROSSWAY, 2019), 36.

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