



"Being truthful, when you know it will cost you, is the true test of honesty."

—Dave Weinbaum

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## **The Victim: Truth**

As the presidential campaign grinds on toward the day of the election, everyone agrees that this political season has degraded into one of the meanest in recent memory. TownHall.com quotes Prison Fellowship founder Chuck Colson as saying, "When I was in politics, I was accused of being Nixon's 'dirty tricks expert'—but I never rose to the heights, or rather sank to the depths, of this year's campaign." Colson writes in his column, "Campaign of Hate," on September 16, 2004:

In one sense, the degrading of political discourse is part of a broader pattern in American life: the coarsening of culture. You see it in the clothing people wear (or don't wear), the lack of manners, and the vulgar language that has become commonplace. Cultures coarsen when morality declines.

But this year there's something more to it.

We have come to expect mudslinging and attack ads, especially during the waning days of presidential campaigns. Two and a quarter centuries of such campaigns have produced mean-spirited personal attacks on candidates, from

opponents calling James Madison a pygmy to Southern cartoonists depicting Abraham Lincoln as an ape. George W. Bush joins Dan Quayle and Ronald Reagan in the dunce club, while John Kerry can claim John F. Kennedy and Michael Dukakis as fellow elitist, New England liberals.

The "something more" that Colson senses consists of two elements: 1) an attitude of utter hatred behind the attacks, and 2) a fundamental disregard for the truth. The attacks are more bitter, visceral, and partisan than in former years, and the candidates and their proxies are issuing them in a game of one-upmanship with insufficient concern for their accuracy. It is almost as if both sides have determined that the campaign that strikes last before Election Day will win at the polls, and whether their punches are fair or not matters little. Anything goes for such a prize.

It is ironic that a central issue of the campaign is honesty—both sides have accused the other of lying, resulting in the suffering and death of many: Kerry about Vietnam and Bush about Iraq—yet neither side has qualms about shading the facts to its advantage or lying outright. Spin is in, and perception is everything. Truth does not even enter into this equation. If it does, it is in the form of what the recently out-of-the-closet New Jersey Governor James McGreevey calls "one's unique truth."

However, in today's political world, what is truth to one may not be truth to another. For instance, the Bush administration's truth about Iraq and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is totally different from the Kerry campaign's truth. Even though major stockpiles of WMD have not been found in Iraq, enough small finds have been made to allow the Bush team to trumpet their contention that America's attack was justified. Kerry supporters, though, take the exact opposite view, arguing that the little that has been found proves America's war in Iraq was illegal, imperial, unjustified, and rash.

What is the truth? Saddam Hussein had and used WMDs both against Iran and against the Kurds in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Throughout the Clinton administration and into the Bush administration, Hussein made it known that he still had such weapons and had no reluctance about employing them again. He publicized that his scientists were hard at work on delivery

systems and new terrors. What he actually had to work with is unknown, but every nation's intelligence of the situation agreed that Iraq was a WMD threat.

Bush acted on this by going to war, believing that removing the threat was vital in winning the War on Terror. In his place, Kerry says, he would not have taken such a drastic measure, believing that further negotiation, continuing the economic embargo, and increasing pressure from a larger coalition would have solved the crisis.

The key to understanding this is that neither side is dealing with the truth but with *belief*. They have *believed* something to be true and acted on it—campaigning on it—whether it was true or not. Belief, however, has no foundation without real, authoritative truth. One can believe the moon is made of green cheese all he wants, but such belief does not make it true. In fact, this belief is really folly.

The prophet Isaiah writes concerning the Israel of his day, which parallels the societal state of modern America: "Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. So truth fails, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey" ([Isaiah 59:14-15](#)). We have come to the point that truth does not matter anymore, which means that justice, righteousness, equity, and [goodness](#) are no longer goals people strive to attain. What most people seek is whatever they believe is best for them; this is the new standard of "truth."

Truth, which has "fallen in the street," is the victim of man's human nature running roughshod over everything to get for itself. Who will brave the mean streets to revive it?

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Let's Get Real!](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Like Plato's cave analogy, the shadow versus reality theme was well established in scripture over 1000 years before Plato came on the scene. The shadow and reality theme figures prominently in God's instructions to Moses to make the tabernacle exactly according to the pattern shown on the mountain. God wanted the shadow to be so much like the reality so that we could identify the reality from the shadow. As beings created in God's image, we exist as imperfect shadows. As we follow the example of Christ, the real genuine authentic Light that reveals God's way, we also move from shadow to reality. Our reality is growing up into the Head in all things, as the Apostle Paul, who realized that his life in the flesh was transitory, a mere shadow of the more real eternal life he would experience later.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Beatitudes, Part Four: Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

It is quite rare to see a person who truly hungers and thirsts after God's way, but this is the kind of desire God wants us to have. John Ritenbaugh explains what Jesus means in this fourth beatitude.

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