



Volume 4 Issue 4

West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



April 2017

Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

"Our time is ending: My days are extinct, are put out, as a candle which, from the first lighting, is continually wasting and burning down, and will by degrees burn out of itself, but may by a thousand accidents be extinguished. Such is life. It concerns us therefore carefully to redeem the days of time, and to spend them in getting ready for the days of eternity, which will never be extinct." ~ Matthew Henry on Job 17:1

Expository Preaching - The Antidote to Anemic Worship

Evangelical Christians have been especially attentive to worship in recent years, sparking a renaissance of thought and conversation on what worship really is and how it should be done. Even if this renewed interest has unfortunately resulted in what some have called the “worship wars” in some churches, it seems that what A. W. Tozer once called the “missing jewel” of evangelical worship is being recovered.

Nevertheless, if most evangelicals would quickly agree that worship is central to the life of the church, there would be no consensus to an unavoidable question: What is central to Christian worship? Historically, the more liturgical churches have argued that the sacraments form the heart of Christian worship. These churches argue that the elements of the Lord’s Supper and the water of baptism most powerfully present the gospel. Among evangelicals, some call for evangelism as the heart of worship, planning every facet of the service—songs, prayers, the sermon—with the evangelistic invitation in mind.

Though most evangelicals mention the preaching of the word as a necessary or customary part of worship, the prevailing model of worship in evangelical churches is increasingly defined by music, along with innovations such as drama and video presentations. When preaching the word retreats, a host of entertaining innovations will take its place.

Traditional norms of worship are now subordinated to a demand for relevance and creativity. A media-driven culture of images has replaced the word-centered culture that gave birth to the Reformation churches. In some sense, the image-driven culture of modern evangelicalism is an embrace of the very practices rejected by the Reformers in their quest for true biblical worship.

Music fills the space of most evangelical worship, and much of this music comes in the form of contemporary choruses marked by precious little theological content. Beyond the popularity of the chorus as a musical form, many evangelical churches seem intensely concerned to replicate studio-quality musical presentations.

In terms of musical style, the more traditional churches feature large choirs—often with orchestras—and may even sing the established hymns of the faith. Choral contributions are often massive in scale and professional in quality. In any event, music fills the space and drives the energy of the worship service. Intense planning, financial investment, and priority of preparation are focused on the musical dimensions of worship. Professional staff and an army of volunteers spend much of the week in rehearsals and practice sessions.



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Expository Preaching - The Antidote to Anemic Worship - Cont'd

All this is not lost on the congregation. Some Christians shop for churches that offer the worship style and experience that fits their expectation. In most communities, churches are known for their worship styles and musical programs. Those dissatisfied with what they find at one church can quickly move to another, sometimes using the language of self-expression to explain that the new church “meets our needs” or “allows us to worship.”

A concern for true biblical worship was at the very heart of the Reformation. But even Martin Luther, who wrote hymns and required his preachers to be trained in song, would not recognize this modern preoccupation with music as legitimate or healthy. Why? Because the Reformers were convinced that the heart of true biblical worship was the preaching of the word of God.

Thanks be to God, evangelism does take place in Christian worship. Confronted by the presentation of the gospel and the preaching of the word, sinners are drawn to faith in Jesus Christ and the offer of salvation is presented to all. Likewise, the Lord’s Supper and baptism are honored as ordinances by the Lord’s own command, and each finds its place in true worship.

Furthermore, music is one of God’s most precious gifts to his people, and it is a language by which we may worship God in spirit and in truth. The hymns of the faith convey rich confessional and theological content, and many modern choruses recover a sense of doxology formerly lost in many evangelical churches. But music is not the central act of Christian worship, and neither is evangelism nor even the ordinances. The heart of Christian worship is the authentic preaching of the word of God.

Expository preaching is central, irreducible, and nonnegotiable to the Bible’s mission of authentic worship that pleases God. John Stott’s simple declaration states the issue boldly: “Preaching is indispensable to Christianity.” More specifically, preaching is indispensable to Christian worship—and not only indispensable, but central.

The centrality of preaching is the theme of both testaments of Scripture. In **Nehemiah 8** we find the people demanding that Ezra the scribe bring the book of the law to the assembly. Ezra and his colleagues stand on a raised platform and read from the book. When he opens the book to read, the assembly rises to its feet in honor of the word of God and respond, “Amen, Amen!”

Interestingly, the text explains that Ezra and those assisting him “read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8). This remarkable text presents a portrait of expository preaching. Once the text was read, it was carefully explained to the congregation. Ezra did not stage an event or orchestrate a spectacle—he simply and carefully proclaimed the word of God.

This text is a sobering indictment of much contemporary Christianity. According to the text, a demand for biblical preaching erupted within the hearts of the people. They gathered as a congregation and summoned the preacher. This reflects an intense hunger and thirst for the preaching of the word of God. Where is this desire evident among today’s evangelicals?



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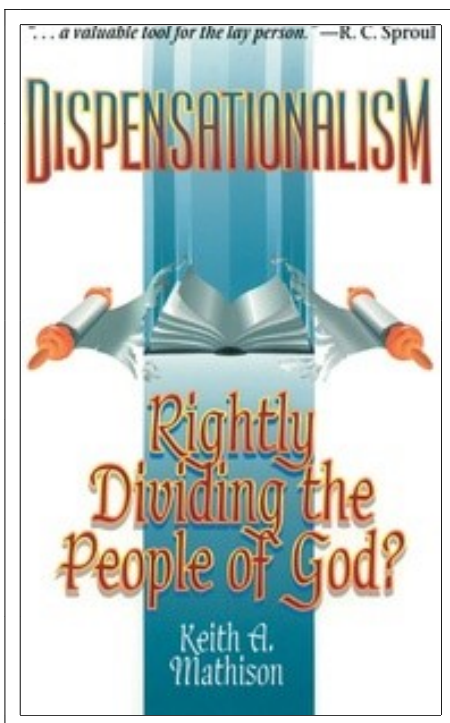
In far too many churches, the Bible is nearly silent. The public reading of Scripture has been dropped from many services, and the sermon has been sidelined, reduced to a brief devotional appended to the music. Many preachers accept this as a necessary concession to the age of entertainment. Some hope to put in a brief message of encouragement or exhortation before the conclusion of the service. As Michael Green so pointedly put it: “This is the age of the sermonette, and sermonettes make Christianettes.”

The anemia of evangelical worship—all the music and energy aside—is directly attributable to the absence of genuine expository preaching. Such preaching would confront the congregation with nothing less than the living and active word of God. That confrontation will shape the congregation as the Holy Spirit accompanies the word, opens eyes, and applies that word to human hearts. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*

Book Review

Dispensationalism - Rightly Dividing the People of God?

Dr. Keith A. Mathison



For years, dispensational teachings have flooded evangelical airwaves and bookstores. Are they biblical? Dr. Keith A. Mathison provides a clear, scriptural critique of this popular movement.

Dispensationalism dispels much of the current confusion and answers questions such as:

- Is the church age a mysterious “parenthesis”
- Will believers be raptured out of the world prior to a period of great tribulation?
- What do dispensationalists believe concerning the Kingdom of God, the Millennium, and the central doctrines of salvation?
- How do those views compare with Scripture and the historic teachings of the church?

Dr. Mathison allows dispensational writers to speak for themselves. He contrasts dispensationalism’s views on the church, salvation, and end times with Reformed views. This insightful book can help you discover what Scripture actually teaches about the Tribulation, Rapture, and the Millennium. It includes sections on lordship salvation and the relationship between Israel and the church.



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What does the Bible say about War? Is there ever a Just Reason for it?

Since September 11, talk of war and eliminating terrorism has dominated our lives. The atrocities committed against many unsuspecting civilians appear so obviously unjust that many of us have likely supported the war in Afghanistan without asking if we have biblical grounds to do so.

Through the centuries, *three* main viewpoints have emerged from within the church in response to the question of war:

(1) Some believe no war is justifiable (a position called pacifism). (2) Others believe Christians must submit to their government and agree to fight in any war it engages in (a viewpoint known as activism). (3) But the majority of Christians hold the view that believers may support or join in defensive wars against evil aggressors--a position known as the just war theory.

We identify ourselves with the third approach--the just war theory. Here are three reasons why we believe just wars are permissible and at times, necessary.

God Considers Human Life Precious

At first glance, that statement may seem to exclude all wars, but it is a vital truth that supports the principles that follow.

From the outset, the Bible affirms the exclusive place humanity holds in creation. God created us with the unique privilege of bearing His image (Genesis 1:26-27): He made us moral beings responsible to Him, endowed us with creative abilities like His, and set us in dominion over the earth and its occupants (cf. Psalm 8).

As bearers of His image, we are designed to reflect God's ruling, creative, and moral nature and character. Adam's fall seriously marred mankind's likeness to God and sin sours every expression of it, but vestiges of it remain. And it is that image of God in mankind that makes all human life precious. Here are some verses affirming the special value of human life:

What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet. (Psalm 8:4-6)

Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31)

How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. (Matthew 12:12)

But no one can tame the tongue ... With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. (James 3:8-10)



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What does the Bible say about War? Is there ever a Just Reason for it? -Cont'd

God Commands Protection of Human Life

Because life is precious, God decreed its preservation and protection by calling for the punishment of anyone who murders a bearer of His image. He issued this command when Noah left the ark to begin a fresh start on dry land:

Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man. (Genesis 9:5-6)

One of the first things God imprinted on Noah's mind after the Flood was a renewed appreciation for human life. Life is so precious, in fact, that it must be protected - God commands the death of those who murderously shed another's blood. The execution of murderers highlights the sanctity of human life and the seriousness of harming those created in God's image.

God Commissioned Government to Punish Evildoers

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul declares that God empowers governments to punish those who do evil. Civil officials are told to bear the sword as avengers and execute wrath on those who practice wickedness:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (Romans 13:1-7)

First Peter 2:13-14 is in agreement - God ordained government to ensure order in society by punishing evildoers:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

Those verses indicate that God gives governments the responsibility of carrying out punishment on those who commit deadly atrocities - like those perpetrated on September 11. And that responsibility includes waging war when necessary against nations or groups that carry out such actions. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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Is It True That God Blesses Those Who Bless Israel and Curses Those Who Curse Israel?

It must be true, because this is what God says, isn't it? Well, actually God says this, *"I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* ([Genesis 12:3](#)).

When God makes a promise we can know that it is certain, and that He will not change. The problem is, however, when we hear Him saying what He did not say. This text does not say that God will bless those who bless Israel, but rather those who bless Abraham, to whom God is speaking. Later, however, in Numbers 24, it gets a little more clear. There Balaam, clearly speaking about the nation of Israel says, *"Blessed is he who blesses you, And cursed is he who curses you."*

That should settle the matter, should it not? The difficulty is still, however, answering about whom this promise is made. Does not Paul himself say, *"But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel"* ([Romans 9:6](#)). Here it is all too easy to get confused. What could it mean that not all Israel is of Israel?

If there are some who are Israel that are called Israel, and some that are not Israel that are called Israel, which of these are the ones that fit the promise? My dispensational friends suggest that the Israel to whom this promise is made matches up with the nation of Israel founded in 1948 in the Middle East. They hear in this promise that those who bless that nation of Israel will be blessed and those who curse that same nation will be cursed. This, in part, informs the politics of American foreign policy. As long as America sees this Israel as a friend, the reasoning seems to go, God will bless America. When America turns its back on that nation, God will curse this nation.

The Reformed perspective takes a different tack. It affirms that that Israel which is actually Israel, just as with the promise to Abraham in [Genesis 12:3](#), applies to those who are in Christ, who trust in His finished work. Though we deny the moniker, this is what our dispensational friends call "replacement theology." The Reformed, however, see this is as the outworking of the truth of [Galatians 3:7](#)- *"Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham."* We who are Reformed do not believe God replaced Israel with the church. We believe instead that there has always been only one people of God, those who believe.

Israel is the sons of Abraham. Those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham. Those who are of faith are therefore Israel. And in turn, those who bless those who are of faith will be blessed, and those who curse those who are of faith will be cursed. It is how we treat the church that matters. What of ethnic Israel? What of that country in the Middle East? Many in the Reformed camp hold out hope that there will be one day a mass conversion of those who are not today the sons of Abraham, that virtually all of Israel will once again become Israel. That said, many of these likewise hold out hope that there will be a mass conversion of Arabs, and Persians, of every tongue and every tribe. All of the promises of God belong to the children of Abraham, those who are of faith, including the promise that through Abraham, all the world will be blessed. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Jr.**



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The Puritans - The Second Generation Reformers

The Puritan age was a golden era of church history. Few generations have ever been assembled on the stage of human history were more devoted to godly living than the Puritans. Randall Peterson notes, “*As seers of Divine truth, and as surgeons of human souls, the Puritans remain peerless.*” The Puritans were second-generation reformers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who stood upon the shoulders of the first generation reformers who lived in the first part of the sixteenth century, such as Luther, Calvin, Beza, and others. The essential doctrines of the Reformers were the truths embraced by the Puritans.

Who were the Puritans? They were devout men within the Church of England who sought to purify its doctrine and practice. For this reason, they were given the name “Puritan.” Their name came from their efforts to “purify” the Church of England both its theology and methodology. They also sought to “purify” themselves and society. They were sound in doctrine and strong in their zeal for God. Few men and women were ever raised up by Christ to serve the church who were more godly than the Puritans. Above all, the Puritans were distinguished by their unwavering loyalty to the authority of God’s Word.

The Puritan age was a golden era of God-centered, Christ-exalting living. For them, the traditions of men, including the beliefs and practices of the Church of England, must yield to the supreme authority of Scripture. As such, the Puritans became the new champions of sola Scriptura—Scripture alone—and followed in the footsteps of the Reformers.

English Puritanism began as a reform movement in the early years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, who assumed the British throne in 1558. Protestant exiles had been driven out of England under the Catholic Queen Mary. After Mary was removed from her throne, these exiles returned to their homeland and brought a desire of political, cultural, and spiritual reform. These Protestants sought a further reformation of government and of church liturgy than had been implemented, earning the derogatory epithet “Puritan.”

As a latter part of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Puritans were fiercely committed to Scripture. They believed that the Reformation in England had not gone far enough. So, these spiritually-minded men—pastors, theologians, and laymen—attempted to bring the Church of England to yet further conformity to Scripture.

While in European exile, these fleeing Englishmen learned a distinctly God-centered lifestyle from John Calvin in Geneva. Many foreigners crowded into this Swiss refuge during Calvin’s tenure were Protestants from England. These men and women were forced to flee England because of the bloody reign of Mary Tudor. In the providence of God, their exile for many of them led them to live in Geneva, where they attended the English-speaking church pastored by John Knox. They returned to England with the zealous intent of completing the Reformation in England by teaching ‘*the true knowledge of God’s Word which we have learned in this our banishment,*’ and so they did. ~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson - President of OnePassion Ministries**



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John Knox: Fearless Faith

Wielding astonishing influence over Scotland in the sixteenth century, John Knox (c. 1514–72) was one of the most heroic leaders and towering figures in the annals of church history. Regarded as ‘the Father of the Scottish Reformation’ and ‘the Founder of the Scottish Protestant Church,’ Knox was a spiritual tour de force of unmatched vigor in spreading the kingdom of God. With resolute convictions, this fiery Reformer established his native land as an impenetrable fortress of biblical truth, one that would reverberate throughout the known world. If Martin Luther was the hammer of the Reformation and John Calvin the pen, John Knox was the trumpet.

Given his immense impact upon Scotland’s history and the larger evangelical world, it is time to reintroduce Knox to a new generation of Christian believers. Predominantly forgotten in the modern era, his grave lies beneath a parking lot on the south side of St. Giles’ Cathedral in Edinburgh. There is a great need in this present hour for Knox to be resurrected in the memory of all those who share his biblical convictions. This book contributes to that effort by profiling the extraordinary life and powerful preaching of this luminous Scottish Reformer.

At the dawn of the sixteenth century, a thick spiritual darkness veiled the land of Scotland. The religious superstitions of Rome held the nation with an ironclad grip. The Bible was virtually a closed book, and the gospel of grace had been eclipsed by a popish religion of works-righteousness. The clergy groped about in spiritual ignorance as blind leaders of the blind. A famine of the hearing of the Word of God had left the nation impoverished and spiritually emaciated. It was into such a spiritual drought that John Knox, like a Scottish Jeremiah, providentially entered this world.

The early days of John Knox’s life did not reveal that he would one day be a leader of his nation and of the church. He was a man of humble beginnings. Though he would receive a fine education and was mentored by men strong in the faith, these traits alone did not set Knox apart or enable him to have such significant impact. The story of John Knox’s life is the story of the God who delights in raising up insignificant people to bring glory to His name. The young John Knox was a man like any other. As he placed his life in God’s hands, however, he became the mighty trumpet whose clarion call would echo across the land.

Today, Knox’s legacy is that of a passionate preacher and prominent Reformer. But before he was a Reformer, he was a ‘Reformer in the making.’ His skills as an expositor of God’s Word and as a prophetic challenger of the status quo were developed over a period of years and even decades. God laid a foundation in Knox’s boyhood that would later hold firm through the storms of life, faithfully building him up piece by piece into the man he would become.

Reaching down through the centuries and extending to this present hour, the legacy of John Knox remains firmly implanted in many areas of the worldwide church. Knox was influential in the formation of a Reformed church government and polity, education, and doctrinal creed. However, the one area in which Knox proved to be most impactful was in a return to biblical preaching. Every history-altering reformation begins at this point. The Reformers were first and foremost preachers. To understand the force of their lives is to grasp the impact of their pulpit ministries. J. H. Merle d’Aubigne, the noted historian of the Reformation in Europe, has written, ‘*The only true Reformation is that which emanates from the Word of God.*’ This is especially true with Knox in Scotland.



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John Knox: Fearless Faith - Cont'd

A man known for his biblical preaching, Knox has been called *'the greatest of Scotsmen.'* Through his expositions of Scripture, he established Scotland as a fortress for Reformed truth. He was *'the Reformer of his country,'* who ushered in the Scottish Reformation, principally, through his pulpit power. The recovery of biblical preaching found its champion in this emboldened figure.

Throughout his ministry, Knox remained focused upon the preaching of the Word. While in England, he was a pastor and then an itinerant preacher, proclaiming the Word throughout the country. While in Europe, he pastored and preached in both Frankfurt and Geneva. During his time in Edinburgh, Knox preached to his congregation at St. Giles' twice on the Lord's Day and three times during the week. In addition, he conducted extensive preaching tours throughout the country. Whether in his own pulpit or traveling, whether in a church building or private home, Knox was incessantly preaching wherever he was.

As a powerful and prolific preacher of the Word, the influence of Knox on preaching in Scotland was staggering. In 1560, when Knox returned to his homeland, there were only twelve ministers in the whole of Scotland. Seven years later, there were 250 ministers. In addition, there were 150 *'exhorters'* and 450 lay leaders who ministered the Scriptures. The bold preaching of Knox inspired the preaching of other courageous men, and the pulpit ministry of this valiant Reformer filled Scotland with a love for preaching God's Word. Noted historian of preaching John Broadus recounts standing in Knox's pulpit in Stirling some three centuries later and longing to catch something of Knox's *'bold and zealous spirit'* in preaching.

The strong character of John Knox's ministry of the Word resonates across the centuries. The commitments described are worthy guideposts for later generations of preachers as well. ~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson - President of OnePassion Ministries**

Jesus Christ is Superior to the Ceremonial Law

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

The ceremonial law governed the form of Israel's worship. When Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled that law as well as the judicial. Sacrifice was the heart of all Old Testament worship, and as the perfect sacrifice, Jesus brought all the other sacrifices to an end. While He was on the cross, *"the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"* (Mathew 27:51). Christ Himself became the new and perfect way into the Holy of Holies, into which any man could come by faith.

In this way, the Levitical, priestly, sacrificial system ended. Though the temple was not destroyed until A.D. 70, every offering made on its altar after Jesus died was needless. Symbolically, they had no more significance. Of course, the Tabernacle and Temple sacrifices that were offered even before Christ's death never had power to cleanse from sin. They were only pictures of the Messiah-Savior's work of cleansing, pictures that pointed to that supreme manifestation of God's mercy and grace.

The ceremonial law ended because it was fulfilled. Since the reality had come, the pictures and symbols had no more place or purpose. From Genesis 1:1 through Malachi 4:6, the Old Testament is Jesus Christ. It was inspired by Christ, it points to Christ, and it is fulfilled by Christ. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Birthday and Anniversary Corner - April 2017

Birthdays

*Carol L (7)
David A (8)*

Anniversaries

Walt and Carol L (15)(50th)

Fortress for Truth

No man can be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, devices, endeavors, will, and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will, and work of another, namely, of God alone. For as long as he is persuaded that he himself can do even the least thing toward his salvation, he retains some self-confidence and does not altogether despair of himself, and therefore he is not humbled before God, but presumes that there is—or at least hopes or desires that there may be—some place, time, and work for him, by which he may at length attain to salvation. But when a man has no doubt that everything depends on the will of God, then he completely despairs of himself and chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work; then he has come close to grace, and can be saved. ~ *German Reformer - Martin Luther*

Theologian for the Ages

When God elects one and rejects another, it is owing not to any respect to the individual, but entirely to His own mercy which is free to display and exert itself when and where He pleases. . . in order to humble the pride of the flesh. Since God places your salvation in Himself alone, why should you descend to yourself? Since He assigns you His own mercy alone, why will you recur to your own merits? ~ *Swiss Reformer -John Calvin*

Disclaimer

The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or it’s leadership.



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