



Volume 3, Issue 2

# *West Suffolk Epistle*

## *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

*“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”*



February 2016

*Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America*

## *A Father’s Main Responsibility*

*John Calvin (1509 - 1564)*

*For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. - Genesis 18:19*

Let us...note that we are told here that God knows Abraham will instruct his children to walk in his way after him. *First*, there is instruction, and then what kind [of instruction] is noted. In other words, we are told the nature of that instruction and then how it extends beyond death. So in the person of Abraham, we see what the responsibility of all believers is, principally the responsibility of the fathers of family whom God set up as heads of household and to whom He gave life, children, and servants so they would be diligent in teaching them. For when a father has children, his responsibility is not only to feed and clothe them, but his principal responsibility is to guide them so that their lives will be well regulated, and he will dedicate his full attention to that...

God values His servant Abraham’s piety, which is shown in the effort he will make to serve and honor Him and to guide his family and those entrusted to his charge, for it is particularly stated that he will teach them to walk in the way of the Lord. Consequently, we see the nature of the right kind of instruction. For someone could be rather careful to give many rules and many laws without providing stability. There can be no foundation to build on unless God dominates and people obey Him and conform to His Word. That, then, is what we have to remember.

When fathers of family and those of some preeminence get ready to teach, they must not be presumptuous and say, “This seems good to me,” and then try to subject everybody to their opinion and their concepts. “What? Shall I teach what I learned from God in His school?” What we have to remember from this passage is, briefly, that no one will ever be a good teacher unless he is God’s pupil. So let there be no teaching authority that advances what we invent and what our minds come up with, but let us learn from God so that He will dominate and alone have all preeminence; and may great and small bring themselves into conformity with Him and obey Him. That much for that instruction.

At that time, there was no written law and even less gospel; but Abraham still knew God’s will to the extent necessary. So Abraham is without Scripture, but even so, he does not presume to or attempt to set up laws to his own liking. But he asks God alone to govern and show the way to everybody else and lead them, for he does not wish to say, “Let us go the way I say,” but, “I am teaching you what I have learned from God. And may He alone have all mastery, and may I be a teacher only if I speak as by His mouth.” That is the *second* point we have to remember here.



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### *A Father's Main Responsibility - Continued*

So what is to be noted here is that heads of family must go to the trouble of being instructed in God's Word if they are to do their duty. If they are stupid, if they do not know the basic principles of religion or of their faith and do not know God's commandments or how prayer is to be offered to Him or what the road to salvation is, how will they instruct their families? All the more, then, must those who are husbands and have a family, a household to govern, think, "I must establish my lesson in His Word so that I will not only try to govern myself in accordance with His will, but that I will also bring to it at the same time those who are under my authority and guidance."

Now in the *third* place, Abraham will teach his family to walk in the fear of the Lord after his death, just as it were said that the faithful man is not only to get honor for God and live tomorrow, but that he leaves good seed after his death. For God's Word is the incorruptible seed of life: it endures forever. And even though heaven and earth tend to corruption and will pass away, the Word of God must always retain its power (cf. Matthew 25:3; Isa 40:8; 55:11). Therefore, it is not without reason that it dies with us, is extinguished when God withdraws us from this world, and we carry everything off with us. But let us work, though we are weak and mortal and must depart this world, to leave the Word of God with a root here. And when we are dead and have turned to dust, may God be honored and may His memory endure forever. That, then, is what we have to remember...

Now since God spoke that way, He is saying that Abraham's children, whom he will teach, will do justice and judgment. With those two words, Scripture comprises what concerns the second table of the Law. Moses says they will do justice and judgment. That shows us what the way of God is and how we will show we are obeying Him. For those two words...involve uprightness and equity so that we may be kind, give ourselves to charity, help one another, protect everyone's right and not defraud, abstain from doing wrong and violence to one another, and even help those who need our help.

Now, it is certain that in God's Law there is nothing but justice and judgment. In the first table, we see how we are to worship God, how we are to revere His name, and how we are to practice calling upon Him and trusting in Him so that we will devote ourselves this way to His service and dedicate ourselves to it. All of that is properly called justice and judgment.

Now as I said, that commonly involves our neighbors and the rule of living right with men in uprightness and equity; but that is an ordinary way of speaking in Scripture, and the prophets are filled with it (cf. Isaiah 1:27; 5:16; 28:17). When they deal with God's Law, they sometimes depart from the first table and speak of uprightness and equity. They cry out against fraud, violence, robbery, and such like. Those things, in brief, mention a part while signifying the whole. In this way, although there is here only a type and a portion of God's way, God, in general, nonetheless wanted to declare that Abraham would teach his family to govern itself in all equity and uprightness so that no one would rise up against his neighbor, that no one would commit fraud or do any wrong. That is what we have to remember. ***From Sermons on Genesis, Vol. 1, The Banner of Truth Trust, used by permission, [www.banneroftruth.org](http://www.banneroftruth.org).***



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### *When I Don't Feel Forgiven*

The Christian life is a constant battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. If these forces had their way, it would destroy every single one of God's blood-bought and dearly loved children. But our Lord Jesus assures us that not one of those for whom He shed His precious blood will be lost. Nothing and no one can snatch a Christian, even the weakest Christian, from the strong hands of our omnipotent heavenly Father (John 10:29–30). But this glorious truth does not mean that our Christian lives cannot be disturbed, even deeply disturbed by the world, the flesh, and the devil.

One of the most disturbing experiences a believer can face is losing the felt sense of God's forgiveness. This desolating experience has touched the lives of many Christians throughout the ages. It can happen "all of a sudden." In Ephesians 6:16, Paul writes about "the flaming darts of the evil one"—sudden, perhaps unexpected assaults on our standing in Christ. Or it may be that the loss of the felt sense of God's forgiveness happens slowly over a period of time as we experience sore, unexpected providences.

Whether suddenly or slowly, this is an agonizing experience for any Christian to go through. What are believers to do when they do not feel forgiven?

#### **Root out Sin**

*First*, we must ask ourselves if we are harboring sin in our hearts. Sin natively dulls our hearts and minds to God's grace in His Son. There may be a good and godly reason why we do not feel our Father's forgiving love. It may be that our ever-gracious God is removing the sense of our Christ-won comforts from us in order to awaken us to the sin we are refusing to put to death in our members (Rom. 8:13). The words of Psalm 139:23–24 should never be far from our thoughts: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

#### **Remember the War**

*Second*, we must remind ourselves that we are engaged in a relentless warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The devil will use every strategy he can devise to rob us of our gospel comforts, turn us in upon ourselves, and so overwhelm us with our circumstances that God seems far off or even heartlessly unconcerned about our sad spiritual state (read Psalm 42–43). The Word of God never hides from us the potential costliness of faithful discipleship. In Isaiah 50, God's prophet addresses the Messiah's servants who "walk in darkness and have no light" (v.10). It is hard to imagine what it must be like to be a true believer and yet be so overwhelmed with "darkness" that not even a pinprick of light penetrates the gloom. This, of course, was the experience of the prototypical man of faith, our Savior Jesus Christ. All the lights went out in His life not because He was a disobedient Son but because He was a perfectly obedient Son. The Lord never promises that the life of faith will be a life of unbroken, unsullied communion with Him. The godly life is a natively embattled life, albeit an embattled life punctuated with "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8).



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### *When I Don't Feel Forgiven - Continued*

#### **Recall Our Standing**

**Third**, we must recall that our standing in Christ does not rest in anything in us (our feelings) or done by us (our works), but on the finished work of our Savior on the cross and His continuing work at God's right hand as our Great High Priest. The Christian's whole comfort lies outside of herself. Perhaps this has nowhere been more memorably expressed than in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism:

*Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?*

*A. That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.*

God's truth and the grace of Christ are not qualified, far less nullified, by our feelings. However we might feel, however desperately wretched we might be, if we have believed in God's Son and are resting the whole weight of who we are on Him alone, we are the most blessed and privileged of beings in the cosmos, whether we feel it to be so or not. We are loved in Christ with an everlasting love (Romans 8:37-39). So, "Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God" (Isaiah 50:10). ~ **Dr. Ian Hamilton - Senior Minister of Cambridge Presbyterian Church in England**

### *Receiving Forgiveness*

***"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).***

Just as our feelings of guilt may not correspond with the objective reality of our guilt, so too is it possible for our feelings of forgiveness not to correspond with the objective truth that Christians have been forgiven. Today we will focus on the significance of our feeling forgiven, since it is such an important part of human experience.

**First**, it is possible to feel forgiven without necessarily having received authentic forgiveness. Many non-Christians can go for long periods of time thinking and feeling that God has absolved them even though they have not heeded the teaching of the passage to confess their sins and trust in the person and work of Christ alone. (1 John 1:8-9). As such, their feelings do not match reality.



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## *Receiving Forgiveness - Continued*

**Secondly**, believers are also apt to experience a disconnect between their objective forgiveness and their feelings of pardon, albeit in a manner different than the non-believer. We tend to doubt God's promise of forgiveness whenever we do not feel forgiven. Pastors see Christians every day who have become spiritually paralyzed because they do not feel like God has pardoned their sin.

Unfortunately, too many believers seek to live the Christian life based on their feelings alone. But Scripture is clear that we are forgiven if we have confessed our sins authentically (v. 9). Even if at times feelings of forgiveness are not there, we must trust that the Lord is faithful to His promise to forgive us through Christ Jesus when we seek His face ([Hebrews 10:19–22](#)).

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin ([John 16:7–11](#)), and He often does so by giving us over to guilt feelings. However, persistent feelings of guilt after a person has repented and turned to Christ is evidence of the Devil, not the Spirit. Satan accuses the brethren ([Revelation 12:7–12](#)), tempting us to think that we have not been forgiven in order to devour us ([1 Peter 5:8](#)) and paralyze our ministry. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit comes to build up and heal ([Romans 15:13](#)). His conviction will prod us to seek refuge in Jesus and will not saddle believers with doubts that God keeps His promise to forgive us. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**

## *Desiring Contentment*

God has put eternity in our hearts. He has inscribed heaven on our souls. He created us to long for a perfect world and to desire what is supremely ideal. We want to be fully and finally free from the suffering and misery of this world, and ultimately from our sin—not only the conviction and sadness our sin brings us, but also the hurt and pain it brings to those closest to us. As redeemed but fallen creatures in this fallen world, we desperately want to be done with sin and its consequences. We want to be less proud, less impatient, less sad, less worried, less burdened, and we want to be more holy, more repentant, more prayerful, more at peace, and more content. We are, as Martin Luther taught, *simul justus et peccator*, “at the same time just and sinful.” In Christ, God has declared us righteous, though we still strive each day to mortify our sin in the flesh. But there is a day coming when we will no longer struggle, when our faith shall be sight, when we shall see Christ Jesus face-to-face, when we will no longer desire, no longer need, no longer lack contentment.

But now we look through a glass darkly as we eagerly await the glorious dwelling places Christ is preparing for us in the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells ([2 Peter 3:13](#)). Although we will always long for heaven, God calls us to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves by His sovereign providence ([Philippians 4:11](#)). He calls us to keep our lives free from the love of money and to be content with what we have. God not only tells us to be content but also graciously gives us the reason to be content by reminding us of His promise: “I will never leave you nor forsake you” ([Hebrews 13:5](#)). This is the foundation for true and lasting contentment. It is precisely because the Lord is our Shepherd that we shall not want. But if He is not your Shepherd, expect no contentment. True contentment is not circumstantial, it is relational. It is not based on what happens to us; rather, it is based on who has taken hold of us—the One who dwells within us.



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## *Desiring Contentment - Continued*

If our contentment is based merely on what we have, we will always desire more, but when it is based on who we are in Christ, we will first and foremost desire to know Him more. For if we are to find contentment in all things, we must seek contentment in the only One who can fulfill all our desires—Jesus Christ.

United to Christ, we grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and thus grow more and more desirous of what Christ wants and less and less desirous of what Christ hates. When we grow in grace, the Holy Spirit doesn't put an end to our desires. On the contrary, He renews our minds and transforms our desires to conform to God's desires for us. In essence, contentment is wanting what God wants for us, and what He wants for us is Him. This is why the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (WSC 1). We most glorify God when we most enjoy what He has created us to desire—Himself. ~ **Burk Parsons - Editor of *Tabletalk* magazine and serves as copastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla.**

## *With Gentleness and Respect*

When people first hear the word apologetics, they typically think of our modern use of the word apology. They often conclude that the task of apologetics is apologizing for the Christian faith as if to say we are sorry for our faith. However, the word apologetics derives from the Greek word apologia, which means "to give an answer" or "to make a defense." Apologetics is not an apology, it's an answer—a defense of what we believe. In his first epistle, Peter writes, "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). In his commentary on 1 Peter, Dr. R.C. Sproul writes:

*Our preparation is to make us ready to give a defense and a reason for the hope that is in us... . If your neighbor says, "I notice that you are a Christian. What is it that you believe?" Are you ready to explain not only what you believe but why you believe it? Some Christians tell those who inquire that we simply take a leap of faith with no bother about the credibility or the rational character of the truth claims of the Bible, but that response goes against the teaching of this text. The only leap of faith we are to take is out of the darkness and into the light. When we become Christians, we do not leave our mind in the parking lot. We are called to think according to the Word of God, to seek the mind of Christ and an understanding of the things set forth in sacred Scripture.*

God calls us to be ready to make a defense for the hope that is in us, but notice that He calls us to do it with gentleness and respect. Apologetics isn't just for some Christians, it is for all Christians. We all must know what we believe, why we believe it, how to live it, how to defend it, and how to proclaim it—and we must do so with gentleness and respect. ~ **Burk Parsons - Editor of *Tabletalk* magazine and serves as Co-pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla.**



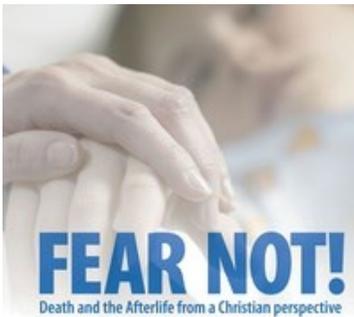
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## *Book Reviews*

### *Fear Not! - Death and the Afterlife from a Christian Perspective (Paperback)*

*Dr. Ligon Duncan*



Most people, even Christians, live in a state of semi-denial about death. We hesitate to say a dearly loved relative or friend died. We prefer to say she passed away or she went to be with the Lord. Even unbelievers who assume that everyone ends up in Heaven are known to say something such as he's gone to a better place.

We, however, do not have to live in ignorance about life after death for either believers or unbelievers. God's Word, the Bible, tells us everything we need to know. It doesn't tell us everything we might want to know, but it tells us everything God wants us to know which means everything we need to know for our instruction and comfort.

**LIGON DUNCAN**  
WITH J. NICHOLAS REID

FOREWORD BY JERRY BRIDGES

And then God has provided ministers to mine His Word for its truths and teach them to the rest of us. Such a man is J. Ligon Duncan, who is both a scholar and a pastor. With a scholars mind and a pastors heart, Dr. Duncan has given to us the excellent book, *Fear Not*, which covers extensively all aspects of death, including what happens to believers immediately after death, the resurrection, the final judgment and then the eternal state. Along the way, he sheds helpful light on several troublesome passages,

especially concerning the final Day of Judgment. This is a book to inform and encourage every Christian. All of us will be edified by its pages. It is my pleasure to commend it to every Christian reader."

—*Jerry Bridges*

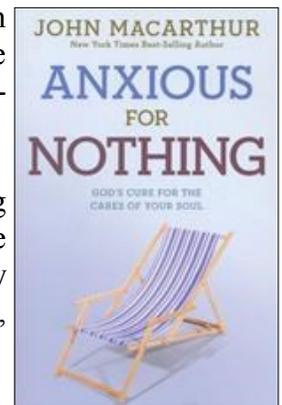
### *Anxious for Nothing (Softcover)*

*Dr. John MacArthur*

As Christians, we're certainly not immune to the troubles of life. We aren't promised an easy road, and when troubles do come, we're urged to rise above them and experience "peace that passes all understanding." But how, in day-to-day life, does that really happen?

While numerous books have been written on overcoming anxiety, *Anxious for Nothing* moves us beyond pop psychology's temporary cures by returning us to our one true source of comfort and victory—Scripture. John MacArthur reminds us that God is completely sovereign, understands our struggles, and has equipped us with resources to not only face, but also to triumph completely over our anxieties.

This book comes with a study guide in the back of the book.





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### *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*

#### *Lawful Oaths and Vows - Chapter 23*

1. A lawful oath is an act of worship in which the person swearing in [the light of God's] truth, righteousness and judgement, solemnly calls God to witness what he swears, and to judge him according to the truth or falsity of it.
2. People should swear by the name of God alone, and his name is to be used with the utmost holy fear and reverence. To swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and awesome name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful and to be abhorred. An oath is sanctioned by the Word of God in weighty and momentous matters to confirm truth and end strife, so a lawful oath imposed by lawful authority ought in such circumstances to be taken.
3. Whoever takes an oath sanctioned by the Word of God ought to consider the seriousness of so solemn an act, and to affirm nothing but what one knows to be the truth. For by rash, false and empty oaths the Lord is provoked and because of them a nation is brought to misery.
4. An oath is to be taken in the plain and ordinary sense of the words, without ambiguity or mental reservation.
5. A vow is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone, and it is to be performed with the utmost care and faithfulness. But monastic vows of a perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are far from representing degrees of higher perfection, rather, they are superstitious and sinful snares in which no Christian ought to entangle himself.

### *Invading the Human Soul*

Biblical worship invades the human soul. It is the soul that too often has been banished from modern worship. We are a people preoccupied with self-image, self-esteem, and self-gratification. Yet in all this we don't even know what a "self" is. The human soul is in exile from our thinking. No wonder, then, that it is not considered relevant to worship. Heaven is too distant to contemplate. Our lives are lived within the restricted boundaries of our terrestrial horizon. We have so despised the notion of pie in the sky that we have lost our taste for it altogether. But when our souls are engaged in worship, our gaze is lifted heavenward, our hearts are set aflame by the divine fire, and we are ready to be done with this world. There is such a thing as mystic sweet communion with Christ in worship. I'm speaking about something that goes beyond emotion (but includes it); that transcends passion (but doesn't annul it); that penetrates to the deepest core of our being, where we sense—nay, we *know*—that we are in the presence of the living God. ~ *A Devotional by Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



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### *Jesus' Teaching on Oaths*

“ Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.” - Matthew 5:33 - 37

Oaths and vows are commended in Scripture, but not every oath or vow is legitimate. Certainly, a vow to commit a sin must not be kept, for we are never to break God's law. David realized this when Abigail's actions kept him from his vow to kill Nabal (1 Samuel 25). Moreover, no one should swear an oath indiscriminately or frivolously. The Westminster Confession of Faith says oaths are appropriate only in “matters of weight and moment” (22.2). This reflects a biblical pattern wherein oaths are commonly associated with covenants ([Genesis 26:3](#); [Psalm 132:11](#)). We should make vows only in matters of great and lasting consequence, such as marriages or court proceedings.

Yet, we are left with some New Testament texts that, on first glance, seem to forbid oaths in our day. Today's passage, for instance, calls us to “let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’” ([Matthew 5:37](#)). Note, however, that the early Christians did not read Jesus' words as prohibiting all oaths. Paul took vows during his ministry ([Acts 18:18](#)), and John records his vision of an angel who swore an oath ([Revelation 10:5–6](#)).

Understanding common first-century Jewish practices helps us see what our Savior was getting at in His teaching on oaths and vows. To keep people from breaking the law's rules regarding our promises ([Numbers 30:1–2](#)), Jewish teachers and leaders invented a system by which they could determine whether a vow had to be kept. Extra biblical literature indicates that many rabbis did not consider it a sin to break a vow if it was not made explicitly in the name of God. Oaths made in the name of heaven or even the gold of the temple were not regarded as ultimately binding. As we might expect from sinners, this led to people making oaths by persons or objects other than God to give them an out in case they did not keep their word.

In [Matthew 5:33–37](#), Jesus points out the foolishness of this teaching by reminding His audience of God's omnipresence. People might think they can get out of their obligations because they did not swear an oath in the name of the Lord, but the Creator is present with those things by which people might swear, and He is the sovereign Creator of all. All things exist by His authority, so to swear an oath at all is to finally swear an oath in His name. A mere change of words does not give one a “get-out-of-oaths-free” card.

Jesus' teaching leads us to conclude that it is better not to make a vow than to swear an oath that we have no intention of keeping. It also reinforces the point that oaths and vows should not be made on just any occasion, but they should be reserved only for occasions of great import and lasting significance. In other cases, we should let our yes be yes and our no be no. But in all circumstances, we must strive to keep our word. ~ *A Devotional by Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



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*“Thoughtfully Reformed -  
Redemptively Relevant”*



*Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America*

*Birthday and Anniversary Corner - February 2016*

### Birthdays

*None to Report*

### Anniversaries

*Jonathan and April Fox - February 5*

*Mike and Rose Myers - February 17*

## *The Waters of Grace*

"My mind is a bucket without a bottom, with no spiritual understanding, no desire for the Lord's Day, ever learning but never reaching the truth, always at the gospel-well but never holding water.

My conscience is without conviction or contrition, with nothing to repent of.

My will is without power of decision or resolution.

My heart is without affection and full of leaks.

My memory has no retention, so I forget easily the lessons learned, and Thy truths seep away.

Give me a broken heart that yet carries home the waters of grace." ~ *Valley of Vision - A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*

### Disclaimer

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



West Suffolk Baptist Church

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