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West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



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Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

In Praise of Heavy Providences



Today, I’m struck anew with how contrary to the world is the Christian life. I’m thinking specifically about how the world will almost without fail define the best way forward in life as the way of ease. That is, the path of least resistance is, by definition, the right path to choose.

This is not so in God’s economy. The Bible is full of reminders about how, in the call of God, things will be difficult rather than easy, complex rather than simple, strenuous rather than leisurely. Indeed, it’s for good reasons that the Bible often calls us to endure and persevere—conditions irrelevant for times of ease.

We get a powerful picture of why God orchestrates things this way when we remember Moses’ words of merciful warning to Israel in Deuteronomy 8:11–19:

Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, “My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.” You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

Beware times of ease, Moses warns, for it is uniquely then that we are tempted to forget God (notice how Moses says nothing of the Israelites forgetting God in the “great and terrifying wilderness”). And the result of forgetting God is to “surely perish.” Indeed, the stakes could not be higher.

So it is that God brings into our lives “heavy providences” as a means of nurturing in us “God remembrance.” I call these circumstances “providences” because it’s God who brings them. I call them “heavy” because, well, that’s what they are—circumstances that are not easy and call for a deep dependence on God for His strength to endure. It is fitting that God would operate this way. Knowing that this most exalts His holy character and results in our eternal good, God will have His people glory (that is, depend) only on Him.



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In Praise of Heavy Providences - Continued

Calling All Pilgrims

One such heavy providence came into my life approximately two years ago when my four school-age children and I said goodbye to their mother and my wife of sixteen years as her nearly five-year battle with breast cancer came to an end. Just after 7 p.m. on February 2, 2014, Julia Pohlman received the “outcome of [her] faith, the salvation of [her soul]” (*1 Peter 1:9*).

Not only in the final moments of Julia’s earthly life but throughout her cancer fight, we were reminded of how fleeting is our life on earth. Through surgeries, CT scans, PET scans, MRIs, blood draws, and near-weekly chemotherapy treatments, we were reminded that this world is not our home. And when I stood at the graveside of my beloved, pleading with the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort to help our grieving family, never has heaven felt so real.

Cancer, perhaps unlike anything else, has a way of focusing your attention on eternal realities. And this, of course, is good. We need to be mercifully weaned from this world so that we can see something of the glory to be revealed.

At Ease In America

I share this story because I believe the American church desperately needs this perspective on life—the perspective captured in the profoundly simple hymn that sings, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through.” But by and large, the evangelical church in America sings, “This world is my home and here I’m putting down roots!” The words of the prophet Amos are a solemn warning to us today:

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion. . . . Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp . . . who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! (Amos 6:1, 4–6)

What the church needs and, therefore, what the world needs are Christians who identify as pilgrims, feel like sojourners, and exist as exiles. When people look at us, do they see a people gloriously uneasy in this world because we’re longing for another?

The Pursuit Of God

Of course, we long for the city of God because we long for God. He is our great pursuit. Knowing this helps this sojourner rejoice in heavy providences, for God is using them to nurture in me a worshipful remembrance of Him—the One in whose presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (*Psalms 16:11*). ~ **Mike Pohlman** - Assistant professor of Christian preaching and chair of the Department of Christian Preaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary



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Truth and True Peace

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. He did so for the sake of the peace, purity, and unity of the church. His first thesis called the church to genuine and continual repentance, and among his last theses he called the church to true peace through Christ. Luther wasn't a rebellious schismatic who sought to lead a revolt against Rome; he was an ardent herald and defender of the gospel who, due to his obstinate and unwavering faithfulness, drew Rome's ire in the midst of its revolt against the truth, the gospel, and the true church. Luther wasn't a divider, he was a peacemaker. For there to be true peace and true unity, there must first be truth, and truth divides before it can unite. Truth must conquer before it can liberate. Luther did not divide the church—Rome divided the church by infusing the church with the false doctrines of men. The Reformers didn't leave Rome—Rome left them by leaving the truth, the gospel, and the church. The Reformers sought reform in Rome, and in return, Rome sought their heads. Rome divided the true church from the false church and kicked out the true church.



The forerunners of the Reformation (such as Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, and Jan Hus) and the Magisterial Reformers of the sixteenth century (such as Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin) are rightly called Reformers, but they were Reformers in the most basic sense of the word. They sought reform in order to bring the church back to her original form. For something to be reformed, there must first be the form itself—and the form the Reformers sought was the original form of the church found in the only infallible guide for faith and life, namely, Scripture, and Scripture alone. Ultimately, the Reformers were not seeking to change the nature of the church, but to call the church back to her biblical identity and to who she must be in order to be the true church.

The Reformers wanted peace, but not at the expense of truth, as Luther cried, *"Peace if possible, but truth at all costs."* True peace only comes through true repentance. In calling Rome to repentance, Luther didn't set out to divide the church but to unite the church and bring about real peace by proclaiming the truth. True peace is found only in the truth of Jesus Christ, and thus real peace and unity can only exist where truth reigns. The true church knows the truth, and the truth sets us free (John 8:32). And when we are free in Christ, we will also seek the truth and, in turn, the peace, purity, and unity of the church for the glory of God alone, *solī Deo gloria*. ~ **Burk Parsons** - Editor of *Tabletalk* magazine and serves as copastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla.



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Remembering the Reformation



Does the Protestant Reformation still matter? If so, why? These are important questions, especially in our day and age, because for many living today in the twenty-first century, what is important is not the past, but the future. We live at an unusual time in history. In terms of technology, the world has changed faster in the last one hundred years than it did in the previous two thousand years combined. This has affected us in many ways. Our generation no longer looks to the wisdom of the past for guidance; instead, we look for the next new invention. History is “yesterday’s news.” What matters is tomorrow.

Sadly, the same way of thinking has influenced Christians. We look at church history with a jaundiced eye, finding it boring or irrelevant, but we must understand that this is an unwise approach. God has always called his people to remember his gracious works in the past. Israel was called to remember the exodus. Christians are called to remember the death of Christ. The same principle holds true with the lessons of church history. It has been rightly said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The church simply cannot afford to forget the lessons of the Reformation.

There are hundreds of books on the Reformation, but if one coming to the subject for the first time were looking for the best place to start, he would be hard pressed to find a better introduction than Dr. Stephen J. Nichols’ *The Reformation* (Crossway, 2007). For those who find history difficult, Nichols’ style of writing is a breath of fresh air. He does not fill page after page with dry lists of names and dates. Instead, his gift is the ability to draw readers into the lives of the people about whom he writes, allowing us to see these great historical figures, warts and all.

Dr. Nichols’ book features eight short chapters, each containing numerous illustrations. As is the case in many Reformation histories, the chapter topics of Dr. Nichols’ book are devoted to the various “branches” of the Reformation. Thus, there are chapters devoted to Luther and the reformation in Germany, Zwingli, the Radical Reformers, Calvin, and the English Reformation. However, unlike some books on the Reformation, Dr. Nichols also includes chapters on the Puritans, and on significant women of the Reformation.

In his chapter on Luther, Dr. Nichols offers a sketch of the important events that led up to Luther’s break with Rome, but he does not lose sight of Luther the man in all of this. We must remember that the Reformers were not ivory-tower theologians, discussing doctrines in the peace and quiet of a modern academy setting. No, the Reformers did their theology in the trenches, and Luther is no exception. Dr. Nichols describes Luther’s personal struggles in a way that helps readers understand more fully not only what Luther did, but why. He also describes Luther’s sense of humor, and his deep love for his wife Katherina. In this way, Dr. Nichols helps us to understand that Luther was not a superhuman being. He was a man providentially placed by God in the midst of extraordinary circumstances.

The same style of writing is evident in the remaining chapters of the book. We find the Reformation initiated in Switzerland during a sausage supper in Zurich with a notable young priest named Zwingli present. We discover the origins of the Anabaptists, those Christians whose convictions concerning baptism and the separation of the church and state often resulted in their martyrdom.



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Remembering the Reformation - Continued

We encounter the young John Calvin, whose overnight stop in Geneva on his way to Strasbourg ultimately changed his life and the course of church history. We see the Reformation gain a foothold in England as a result of a king's desire for a male heir. In all of this, we are introduced to a fascinating and diverse cast of characters, from the soul-searching Martin Luther to the soul-selling Johann Tetzel, from the non-compromising John Knox to the pragmatic Thomas Cranmer.

In his chapter on the Puritans, appropriately titled "Men in Black," Dr. Nichols clears away centuries of misrepresentation. He describes the roots of puritanism in the ups and downs of the reformation in England, agreeing with one scholar that puritanism was the "real English Reformation." In his concluding chapter, Dr. Nichols introduces us to some of the unsung women of the Reformation, the wives of the Reformers as well as women who made significant contributions to the Reformation on their own.

The church must not forget the lessons learned during the Reformation. We cannot forget what happens when the Gospel is obscured and distorted. The Reformation does still matter. Read Dr. Stephen J. Nichols' book and discover why. ~ **Dr. Keith A. Mathison - professor of systematic theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla.**

What Is Reformation Day?

A single event on a single day changed the world. It was October 31, 1517. Brother Martin, a monk and a scholar, had struggled for years with his church, the church in Rome. He had been greatly disturbed by an unprecedented indulgence sale. The story has all the makings of a Hollywood blockbuster. Let's meet the cast.

First, there is the young bishop—too young by church laws—Albert of Mainz. Not only was he bishop over two bishoprics, he desired an additional archbishopric over Mainz. This too was against church laws. So Albert appealed to the Pope in Rome, Leo X. From the De Medici family, Leo X greedily allowed his tastes to exceed his financial resources. So enter the artists and sculptors, Raphael and Michelangelo.

When Albert of Mainz appealed for a papal dispensation, Leo X was ready to deal. Albert, with the papal blessing, would sell indulgences for past, present, and future sins. All of this sickened the monk, Martin Luther. Can we buy our way into heaven? Luther had to speak out.

But why October 31? November 1 held a special place in the church calendar as All Soul's Day. On November 1, 1517, a massive exhibit of newly acquired relics would be on display at Wittenberg, Luther's home city. Pilgrims would come from all over, genuflect before the relics, and take hundreds, if not thousands, of years off time in purgatory. Luther's soul grew even more vexed. None of this seemed right.

Martin Luther, a scholar, took quill in hand, dipped it in his inkwell and penned his 95 Theses on October 31, 1517. These were intended to spark a debate, to stir some soul-searching among his fellow brothers in the church. The 95 Theses sparked far more than a debate. The 95 Theses also revealed the church was far beyond rehabilitation. It needed a reformation. The church, and the world, would never be the same.





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What Is Reformation Day? - Continued

One of Luther's 95 Theses simply declares, "The Church's true treasure is the gospel of Jesus Christ." That alone is the meaning of Reformation Day. The church had lost sight of the gospel because it had long ago papered over the pages of God's Word with layer upon layer of tradition. Tradition always brings about systems of works, of earning your way back to God. It was true of the Pharisees, and it was true of medieval Roman Catholicism. Didn't Christ Himself say, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light?" Reformation Day celebrates the joyful beauty of the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ.

What is Reformation Day? It is the day the light of the gospel broke forth out of darkness. It was the day that began the Protestant Reformation. It was a day that led to Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, and many other Reformers helping the church find its way back to God's Word as the only authority for faith and life and leading the church back to the glorious doctrines of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It kindled the fires of missionary endeavors, it led to hymn writing and congregational singing, and it led to the centrality of the sermon and preaching for the people of God. It is the celebration of a theological, ecclesiastical, and cultural transformation.

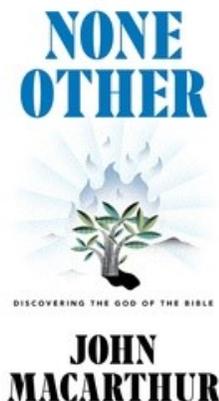
So we celebrate Reformation Day. This day reminds us to be thankful for our past and to the Monk turned Reformer. What's more, this day reminds us of our duty, our obligation, to keep the light of the gospel at the center of all we do. ~ *Dr. Stephen J. Nichols - president of Reformation Bible College, chief academic officer for Ligonier Ministries, and a Ligonier teaching fellow*

Book Reviews

None Other: Discovering the God of the Bible *Dr. John MacArthur*

The Bible's teaching on God's love, holiness, and sovereignty is often met with questions about human responsibility, suffering, and evil. If God is in control of everything, can we make free choices? If God is good and all-powerful, how can we account for natural disasters and moral atrocities? Answers to these questions are often filled with technical jargon and personal assumptions that don't take into account the full scope of biblical truth.

In *None Other: Discovering the God of the Bible*, Dr. John MacArthur shows that the best way to discover the one true God is not through philosophical discourse but a careful study of Scripture—the primary place where God has chosen to reveal Himself.





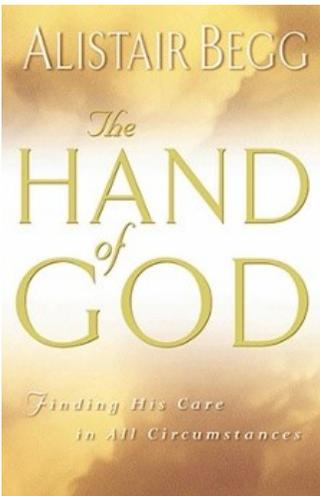
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Book Reviews

The Hand of God

Dr. Alistair Begg



In **Hand of God**, Dr. Alistair Begg asks if we are hapless victims of life's whims. Are we driven along by some blind and impersonal force? Are we battered by circumstances beyond all control? A thousand times, "No!" says Alistair.

Instead, he says we are the objects of God's providential care. We reside under His guiding and protecting hand. It's an amazing and comforting fact: God rules and overrules in the circumstances of life. He is neither a capricious nor a vindictive authority, quite the contrary. God works throughout the circumstances of life to bring about something miraculous - something abundantly good - even out of what we perceive to be our darkest moments.

So take comfort, weary traveler, and read on. Soon, you'll pack up the baggage of your past, the fears of your present, and the prospects of your future - and entrust them all into the hand of the God who cares.

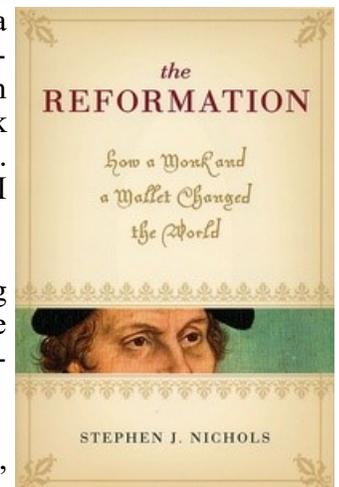
The Reformation

Dr. Stephen J. Nichols

Mention history and some might struggle to stifle a yawn. But when presented as a narrative it can often be compelling reading. Dr. Stephen J. Nichols takes a key period in time, the Reformation, and presents its major players in a fresh way. From Martin Luther, a simple monk who wielded the mallet, to kings and queens, this book goes behind the scenes to uncover the human side of these larger-than-life Reformers. Along the way readers meet Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, Kings Henry VIII and Edward VI, Lady Jane Grey, Anne Bradstreet, and many others.

For those wanting to see history in its context, Dr. Nichols also provides a sampling of primary source materials. It is an engaging read that will remind readers of the foundational truths that can never be taken for granted by the church in any age. Includes numerous illustrations.

The book has eight chapters covering Luther, Zwingli, the Anabaptist, John Calvin, the British Reformation, the Puritans and the women of the Reformation. He even points out things that are frequently not mentioned or considered in overviews of church history. Dr. Nichols decision to focus on lesser known (or misunderstood groups) like the Anabaptists, puritans and women brings people who are frequently lost in the shadows of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin into the light of history they deserve.





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Desiring God's Word

"The judgments of the Lord are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:10).

You should value Scripture more than all earthly treasures



I have a friend who has a beautiful collection of rare Bibles. My favorite is one of the earliest printed copies, dating back to sixteenth-century England. The first time I held it in my hands I noticed that the top third of every page was covered with a dark stain. Tears filled my eyes when I realized it was from the blood of its original owner.

My friend explained that when Bloody Mary ruled England, she delighted in terrorizing Protestants and murdering as many as she could. Her soldiers would execute their victims through some bloody means, then take his or her Bible and dip it into the blood. Some of those Bibles have been preserved and are known as Martyrs' Bibles. Scientists have confirmed that the dark stains on every page of my friend's Bible are, indeed, human blood.

That same Bible is well worn from being studied. And many of its pages have water stains on them—perhaps from tears. Obviously it was someone's most precious possession, and his or her blood is there to prove it.

Psalm 19:10 captures the heart of such people, extolling the preciousness of God's Word. To David, Scripture was more valuable than the best gold and purest honey. Meditating on it meant more to him than the richest and sweetest things in life. He knew its ability to satisfy every spiritual appetite.

As precious as God's Word is, many Christians take it for granted and become complacent in their studies. Some go for long periods without gaining fresh insights from its pages.

Perhaps you know someone who is in that situation. If so, ask the Lord for wisdom as you gently encourage him or her toward greater faithfulness in the Word. At the same time be careful not to become negligent yourself. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

The basic task of the church is to teach sound doctrine. It is not to give one pastor's opinion, to recite tear-jerking illustrations that play on emotions, to raise funds, to present programs and entertainment, or to give weekly devotionals."



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Seeing God

Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18, KJV). We hear this verse quoted frequently in order that we may be inspired and challenged to move with intensity toward a future goal. We applaud the leader who is a visionary, one who can paint a picture of a better future and show us the way to attain it. We are a goal-oriented society. We need a dream, a target to aim for if we are to get our adrenaline moving and our passions stirred.

Every goal, every short-range vision must be measured against the supreme and final norm of all future Christian visions. We must keep before us the ultimate vision of the people of God. We cannot see God because He is holy and we are not. I have never seen God. I have felt His presence and reasoned through His existence. I have read His Word and heard of dazzling displays of His glory. But I have never seen Him. He is invisible. Not only have I never seen Him face to face, but no one else has seen Him either. The creation heralds His majesty; the stars declare His handiwork. We can view the work of the Artist, but the Artist Himself remains unseen.



Why can't we see God? It is not because He is a spirit, nor is it because He is not present. He is here; there is no question about that. We live in a world of real entities that we cannot see with the naked eye. What is invisible to our eyes can have dramatic effects on us.

The forces of electricity and nuclear power affect our daily lives though we do not see them. Our bodies may be invaded at any moment by life-threatening microorganisms. The sophisticated instruments of telescopes and microscopes reveal a dimension of reality that escapes our naked glance.

There is no microscope powerful enough, though, to penetrate the veil that covers the face of God. There is no lens capable of magnifying our weak eyesight to the level of seeing God. Our problem is not a weakness of visual strength. It is not the optic nerve that is deficient. The deficiency is in our hearts, not our eyes. We cannot see God because He is holy and we are not. It is because of sin that we are told, “No man can see God and live.” ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. - Founder and Chairman of Ligonier Ministries**

The Next 500 Years

The 2017 Ligonier National Conference will be held in Orlando, Florida at the First Baptist Church on March 9 - 11, 2017. Speakers at this conference will be Alistair Begg, Tim Challies, Leonardo De Chirico, Sinclair Ferguson, W. Robert Godfrey, Michael Horton, Steven Lawson, Augustus Lopes, John MacArthur, Albert Mohler, Jr., Stephen Nichols, Michael Reeves, R.C. Sproul, Sr., R.C. Sproul Jr., Derek Thomas and Stephen Tong.

Ligonier Ministries invites you to join us in spring 2017 for our annual national conference as we celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Our theme is ***"The Next 500 Years: Reformation 500 and Beyond,"*** and we will focus on the history and doctrine of the Reformation as we consider the future of the church. The same God who brought the Reformation in the sixteenth century is still at work today. His plan has not changed, and what He has purposed for His glory and our good will be accomplished.



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Birthday and Anniversary Corner - November 2016

Birthdays

Brenda A - (1)
April F - (5)
LeAnn M - (10)
Audrey D - (11)
Luke P - (15)
Walt L - (20)

Anniversaries

Gene and Brenda A - (22)
Marlin and Sadie H - (22)
Francis and Phyllis C - (24)

Most of us go through life worrying people will think too little of us. Paul worried people would think too much of him. ~ **Dr. D.A. Carson**

A sheep in the midst of wolves is safe compared with a Christian in the midst of ungodly men. ~ **C.H. Spurgeon**

If you add anything to Christ, you lose Christ. Salvation is in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone ~ **John Stott - English Christian leader and Anglican cleric**

There is no mere doctrine of "the security" of the believer, as though God's keeping of us took place irrespective of the lives we live. Indeed there is no such thing in the New Testament as a believer whose perseverance is so guaranteed that he can afford to ignore the warning notes which are sounded so frequently. ~ **Dr. Sinclair Ferguson**

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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Please submit information to Walt Lawrence by the second Sunday of the month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.