



West Suffolk Epistle



Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”

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Same-Sex Marriage as a Civil Right — Are Wrongs Rights?

We should have seen it coming. Back in 1989 two young activists pushing for the normalization of homosexuality coauthored a book intended to serve as a political strategy manual and public relations guide for their movement. In *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s*, authors Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen argued that efforts to normalize homosexuality and homosexual relationships would fail unless their movement shifted its argument to a demand for civil rights, rather than for moral acceptance. Kirk and Madsen argued that homosexual activists and their allies should avoid talking about sex and sexuality. Instead, “the imagery of sex per se should be downplayed, and the issue of gay rights reduced, as far as possible, to an abstract social question.”

Beyond Kirk and Madsen and their public relations strategy, an even more effective legal strategy was developed along the same lines. Legal theorists and litigators began to argue that homosexuals were a class of citizens denied basic civil liberties, and that the courts should declare them to be a protected class, using civil rights precedents to force a moral and legal revolution.

That revolution has happened, and it has been stunningly successful. The advocates for the normalization of homosexuality and the legalization of same-sex marriage have used legal arguments developed from the civil rights era to their advantage. Arguments used to end the scourge of racial segregation were deployed to normalize homosexuality and homosexual relationships. Over the years, these arguments have led to such major developments as the decriminalization of homosexual behaviors, the inclusion of homosexuals within the United States military, and the legalization of same-sex marriage in some states.

When Rights are Right

What should Christians think about this? We do believe in civil rights. Taken at face value, civil rights are those rights that a person should be recognized to possess simply because he or she is a citizen. Christians should welcome the recognition of civil rights, understanding that the very notion of such rights is based on a Christian worldview and the affirmation that every human being is made in God’s image, and therefore possesses dignity and certain essential rights. In the language of the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Even as secularists do their best to establish some grounding for civil rights without reference to God, the founding language of our nation—in agreement with biblical principles—clearly affirms that these liberties are given to all people by the Creator.

Beyond this fact, we must be thankful that an expanding understanding of civil rights has led our nation to address wrongs and to make moral progress in ending wrongful discrimination.



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Same-Sex Marriage as a Civil Right — Are Wrongs Rights? - Continued

The civil rights movement of the late twentieth century saw America come face to face with the reality that, as a nation, we were not living up to our own commitment to those rights.

The key question we now face is this: Does recognition of civil rights for all people require the normalization of homosexuality and the legalization of same-sex marriage?

That is precisely what gay rights proponents have been claiming for the past thirty years, and their arguments have gained much ground. In 2003 the Supreme Court struck down criminal laws against homosexual behavior in the decision known as *Lawrence v. Texas*. Writing for the majority, Justice Anthony Kennedy argued that the Constitution does not allow for the criminalization of homosexual acts, since such laws would deny a specific class of persons their basic civil rights. A series of similar court decisions has followed, with several courts ruling that outlawing same-sex marriage is a similar denial of a civil right.

When Rights Are Wrong

At this point Christians have to think very carefully. We do not want to deny anyone his or her civil rights. To do so would not only violate the Constitution but also deny the rights that are granted, not by the government, but by the Creator. But is same-sex marriage such a right? The answer to that question must be no.

Marriage laws always discriminate. Current laws discriminate on the basis of age, marital status, and gender, as well as a host of other issues. The law itself necessarily discriminates. For instance, married people pay fewer taxes and women enjoy maternity leave. The question is whether such discrimination is right or wrong.

Discrimination on the basis of an unchangeable characteristic such as skin color would be wrong. But Christians cannot accept the argument that homosexuality is an immutable characteristic. While recognizing the complexity of issues related to sexual orientation, we cannot define a behavior as an intrinsic characteristic. On that basis, why not grant theft or other sinful behavior the same civil rights protection?

Furthermore, we recognize that marriage, like human rights, exists prior to the law. Christians understand that marriage was instituted by the Creator, who designed marriage and the family as the foundational social unit of human society. Marriage unites a man and a woman in a holy covenant that should last as long as they both live.

From the very beginning, marriage was designed as the union of one man and one woman. Every human society has recognized this meaning of marriage, and all successful civil societies have honored, protected, and defended heterosexual marriage as the union that should govern human sexuality, reproduction, intimacy, and rearing of children.



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Same-Sex Marriage as a Civil Right — Are Wrongs Rights? - Continued

Those pushing for the legalization of same-sex marriage have been tremendously successful in convincing many people—and several courts—of their argument that same-sex marriage is a civil right. But this is a confusion of categories that Christians cannot accept.

The argument for the legalization of same-sex marriage fails in terms of any constitutional logic that our nation's founders would have conceived. Beyond this, faithful Christians cannot accept such arguments because an even greater authority—the authority of the Bible as the Word of God—binds us.

The Bible is clear in terms of its teachings on both sexuality and marriage. As Jesus Christ declared, God intended marriage as the union of one man and one woman “from the beginning” (Matthew 19:4–6). The legalization of same-sex marriage would confuse and greatly weaken the single institution that is most central to human society and most essential to human flourishing.

Christians responding to demands for the legalization of same-sex marriage cannot accept the argument that the right to marry a person of the same gender is a civil right.

We are living in an era of moral revolution and seismic cultural change. Christians must remember that our ultimate authority is the Word of God. We are thankful for the recognition of civil rights, but we also understand that these rights will be confused in a sinful world. We must understand that the claim that same-sex marriage is a civil right reveals more than constitutional confusion—it reveals the need of every human being for nothing less than the forgiveness, healing, and redemption that can come only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the end of the day, the argument over same-sex marriage is never just about same-sex marriage, and debates about civil rights are never just about civil rights. Deeper truths and worldview implications are always at stake, and it is our responsibility to make certain that we know what those are and stand humbly and compassionately for those truths, regardless of the cost. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*

The All Seeing Eye of God

In all our duties, whether giving or praying, the great thing to be kept in mind is, that we have a heart-searching and all-knowing God. Everything like formality, being artificial, or mere bodily service, is abominable and worthless in God's sight. He takes no account of the quantity of money we give, or the quantity of words we use. The one thing at which His all-seeing eye looks at is the nature of our motives, and the state of our hearts. Our Father sees in secret. ~ *J.C. Ryle*



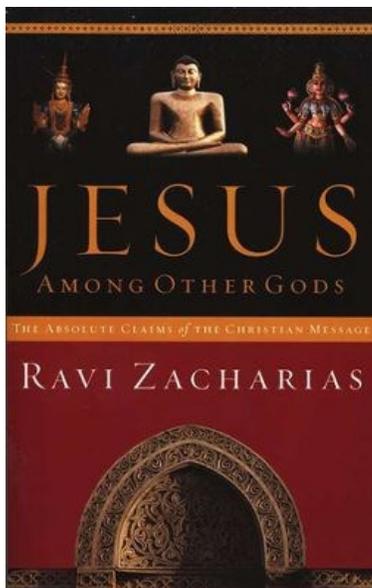
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Book Review

Jesus Among Other Gods

The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message

By Dr. Ravi Zacharias



No such thing as absolute truth? Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias' work is a brilliant defense of the unique truth of the Christian message. Exposing the futility of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, he also highlights his own journey from despair and meaninglessness to the discovery that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

In a world with so many religions, why Jesus?

We are living in a time when you can believe anything, as long as you do not claim it to be true. In the name of “tolerance,” our postmodern culture embraces everything from Eastern mysticism to New Age spirituality. But as Ravi Zacharias points out, such unquestioning acceptance of all things spiritual is absurd. All religions, plainly and simply, cannot be true.

Jesus Among Other Gods provides the answers to the most fundamental claims about Christianity, such as:

- Aren't all religions fundamentally the same?
- Was Jesus who He claimed to be?
- Can one study the life of Christ and demonstrate conclusively that He was and is the way, the truth, and the life?

In each chapter, Zacharias considers a unique claim that Jesus made and then contrasts the truth of Jesus with the founders of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism with compelling insight and passionate conviction. In addition to an impressive breadth of reading and study, he shares his personal journey from despair and meaninglessness to his discovery that Jesus is who He said He is.

“In Jesus Among Other Gods, Ravi Zacharias demonstrates that he is one of the most intellectually gifted as well as spiritually sensitive writers of today’s leading apologists for the Christian faith. Zacharias brings alive the unique power of the claims of Jesus about himself and the utter relevance of his message today for the human condition.”

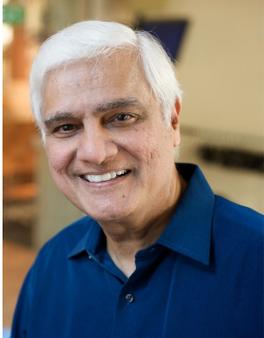
Ravi Zacharias is president of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. Born in India and Cambridge educated, he has lectured in several of the world's most prominent universities, as well as in more than fifty countries. He is author of several books, including Can Man Live Without God, Cries of the Heart and Deliver Us From Evil. He and his wife, Margie, are the parents of three children.



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Profile of Dr. Ravi Zacharias



Ravi Zacharias is Founder and President of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM), which celebrates its thirtieth anniversary in 2014. Dr. Zacharias has spoken all over the world for 42 years in scores of universities, notably Harvard, Dartmouth, Johns Hopkins, and Oxford University. He has addressed writers of the peace accord in South Africa, the president's cabinet and parliament in Peru, and military officers at the Lenin Military Academy and the Center for Geopolitical Strategy in Moscow. At the invitation of the President of Nigeria, he addressed delegates at the First Annual Prayer Breakfast for African Leaders held in Mozambique.

Dr. Zacharias has direct contact with key leaders, senators, congressmen, and governors who consult him on an ongoing basis. He has addressed the Florida Legislature and the Governor's Prayer Breakfast in Texas, and has twice spoken at the Annual Prayer Breakfast at the United Nations in New York, which marks the beginning of the UN General Assembly each year. As the 2008 Honorary Chairman of the National Day of Prayer, he gave addresses at the White House, the Pentagon, and The Cannon House. He has had the privilege of addressing the National Prayer Breakfasts in the seats of government in Ottawa, Canada, and London, England, and speaking at the CIA in Washington, DC.

Dr. Zacharias was born in India in 1946 and immigrated to Canada with his family twenty years later. While pursuing a career in business management, his interest in theology grew; subsequently, he pursued this study during his undergraduate education. He received his Master of Divinity from Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois. Well-versed in the disciplines of comparative religions, cults, and philosophy, he held the chair of Evangelism and Contemporary Thought at Alliance Theological Seminary for three and a half years. Dr. Zacharias has been honored by the conferring of a Doctor of Divinity from Houghton College, Tyndale College and Seminary, and McMaster Divinity College, Toronto, a Doctor of Laws degree from Asbury College, Kentucky, and a Doctor of Sacred Theology from Liberty University, Virginia. He is presently Senior Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford University in Oxford, England. Dr. Zacharias has been a visiting scholar at Cambridge University, where he studied moralist philosophers and literature of the Romantic era. While at Cambridge he also authored his *first* book, *A Shattered Visage: The Real Face of Atheism*, updated and republished in 2004 by Baker as *The Real Face of Atheism*. His *second* book, *Can Man Live without God* (Word, 1994), was awarded the Gold Medallion for best book in the category of doctrine and theology, and *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Word, 2000) was nominated for a Gold Medallion. In all, Dr. Zacharias has authored or edited over twenty books, including *Walking from East to West* (Zondervan, 2006), *The Grand Weaver* (Zondervan, 2007), *The End of Reason: A Response to the New Atheists* (Zondervan, 2008), and *Beyond Opinion* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), which includes contributions from Ravi Zacharias International Ministries' global team. His latest books are *Why Jesus*, released by Faith Words in January 2012, and *Has Christianity Failed You?* (Zondervan, 2010). Several of his books have been translated into Russian, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Spanish, and other languages.

At the invitation of Billy Graham, Dr. Zacharias was a plenary speaker at the International Conference for Itinerant Evangelists in Amsterdam in 1983, 1986, and 2000. He is listed as a distinguished lecturer with the Staley Foundation and has appeared on CNN, Fox, and other international broadcasts. His weekly radio program, "Let My People Think," airs on 2087 outlets worldwide, his weekday program, "Just Thinking," on 706, and his one-minute "Just a Thought," on 414. Various broadcasts are also translated into Romanian and Turkish, and "Let My People Think" airs as the Spanish-language program "Pensemos" on over 250 outlets in seventeen countries. Additionally, his television program, "Let My People Think," is broadcast internationally in several countries including Indonesia.

RZIM is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, with additional offices in Canada, India, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the Middle East, Hong Kong, Romania, Turkey, Austria, Spain, and South Africa. Dr. Zacharias and his wife, Margie, have three grown children. They reside in Atlanta.



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What is a Theophany?

THEOPHANY [the AHF ih knee] — any direct, visual manifestation of the presence of God. The key word is visual, since God makes His presence and power known throughout the Bible in a variety of ways. But even in a theophany a person does not actually see God Himself. This is an impossibility, according to Exodus 33:20; 1 Timothy 6:16; and 1 John 4:12. What a person sees are the effects of God’s unmediated presence.

Theophanies proper are limited to the Old Testament. They are most common in the books of Genesis and Exodus; but they also occur in the writings of the prophets, especially in connection with the calling of a prophet. The most frequent visible manifestation of God’s presence in the Old Testament is the “Angel of the Lord.” Other theophanies are the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–6), the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire (Exodus 13:21–22), the cloud and fire of Sinai (Exodus 24:16–18), and the cloud of the glory of the Lord (Exodus 40:34–38).

The Shekinah glory that dwelt in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and the Temple may also be thought of as a specialized, permanent theophany. Theophanies are never given for their own sake, to satisfy a curiosity about God, but to convey some revelation or truth about Him.

In the New Testament Jesus as the physical expression of God is a kind of theophany (John 1:14, 18; 14:9). But such is the uniqueness of His Incarnation that the word is not entirely appropriate.

The word “theophany” does not appear in the Bible.

What is the Providence of God?

The continuous activity of God in His creation by which He preserves and governs. The doctrine of providence affirms God’s absolute lordship over His creation and confirms the dependence of all creation on the Creator. It is the denial of the idea that the universe is governed by chance or fate.

God acts in accordance with the laws and principles that He has established in the world. The laws of nature are nothing more than our description of how we perceive God at work in the world. They neither have inherent power nor work by themselves.

Divine government is the continued activity of God by which He directs all things to the ends He has chosen in His eternal plan.

- Through His providence He controls the universe – Psalm 103:19
- Through His providence He controls the physical world – Matthew 5:45
- Through His providence He controls human birth and destiny – Galatians 1:15
- Through His providence He controls human successes and failures – Luke 1:52
- Through His providence He controls the protection of His people – Psalm 4:8



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The Regulative Principle

“Nadab and Abihu ... each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (vv. 1–2). Leviticus 10:1–3

Deuteronomy 5:8-11, the second commandment, tells us that we may not make an image of God (the divine nature) or create an image of anything else with the intent of bowing down and serving either it or the being it is supposed to represent. Clearly, this statute is concerned first and foremost with worship, telling us that there are limits to what constitutes the right worship of our Creator. Human hearts are idol factories, as John Calvin once said, and we are prone to making God in our image. Yet, we also tend to shape the worship of the one true God in our own image, after our view of what we find acceptable (Romans 1:18–32). To keep us from sinning against the Lord, Scripture establishes boundaries that we dare not cross when we come before Him.

Many biblical texts clearly teach that our holy Creator takes His worship very seriously. In today’s passage, for example, we read of the occasion on which God struck Nadab and Abihu dead for offering “strange fire” (Leviticus 10:1–3). Commentators are not sure about the exact nature of their infraction, but they do agree that the seriousness of the offense is related to their worshipping God in a manner that He had not commanded. They sought to be innovators in worship, and they paid the price for it. Lest we think that the Lord no longer takes His worship as seriously as He did back then, consider 1 Corinthians 11:27–30. Many of the Corinthian Christians were taking part in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper inappropriately, and some of them died for their unworthy partaking. These passages, and many others, make it clear that it is “a life-and-death matter to worship God according to his command,” as one Reformed theologian has put it.

The notion that we must follow Scripture in organizing our worship and are not permitted to introduce practices that God has not approved is known as the regulative principle. It is drawn from several biblical texts, including today’s passage, and it is reflected in answer 96 of the Heidelberg Catechism. As the catechism states, we may not “worship [the Lord] in any other way than has been commanded in God’s Word.” What we do in worship must be found explicitly in Scripture or deduced by good and necessary consequence from its teaching. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*

The State of Our Soul on Sunday

Let us never forget that our feelings about Sundays are sure tests of the state of our souls. The person who can find no pleasure in giving God one day in the week, is manifestly unfit for heaven. Heaven itself is nothing but an eternal Sabbath. If we cannot enjoy a few hours in God’s service once a week in this world, it is plain that we could not enjoy an eternity in His service in the world to come. Happy are those who walk in the steps of her of whom we read today! They shall find Christ and a blessing while they live, and Christ and glory when they die. ~ *J.C. Ryle*



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Fulfilling God's Law

“In order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” - Romans 8:4

If the Holy Spirit resides within us, we will be able to fulfill the demands of God’s law.

Augustine once said, “Grace was given, in order that the law might be fulfilled.” When God saves us He, by His Spirit, creates within us the ability to obey His perfect law. Because we now live “according to the Spirit”—walking by the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit—we are able to do the righteous things God’s law requires.

Isn’t it wonderful that the Lord no longer expects His law to be lived out only by means of an external code of ethics? Now holiness, righteousness, and obedience to the law are internal, the products of the indwelling Holy Spirit (see Ezekiel 11:19-20).

God’s salvation is more than a spiritual transaction by which He imputed Christ’s righteousness to us. It is more than a forensic action by which He judicially declared us righteous. As great and vital as those doctrines are, they were not applied to us apart from God’s planting His Spirit within our hearts and enabling our lives to manifest the Spirit’s fruit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). We need to remind ourselves regularly that God’s purpose for us after He redeemed us was that we might live a holy life filled with good works (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14). Whenever you are disobedient to God’s will and purpose, you are quenching the Holy Spirit and fighting against yourself and what you know is right. Such disobedience makes about as much sense as the person who holds his breath for no reason and therefore makes his lungs resist their natural function. The believer who disobeys, especially one who persists in a sin, prevents the Spirit from naturally leading him along the path of holiness. We are not perfect after our salvation—that won’t happen until glorification (1 John 3:2-3)—but the Holy Spirit will empower us to live in ways pleasing to God, which is the kind of righteousness that fulfills His law. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

Comprehending the Decretive Will of God

God’s decretive will is sometimes described as the sovereign, efficacious will by which God brings to pass whatever He pleases by His divine decree. An example of this may be seen in God’s work of creation. When God said, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), He issued a divine imperative. He exercised His sovereign, efficacious will. When He did so, it was impossible for the light not to appear. It appeared by the sheer necessity of consequence.

The decretive will can have no other effect, no other consequence than what God sovereignly commands. He did not request the light to shine. Neither did He coax, cajole, or woo it into existence. It was a matter of absolute authority and power.

No creature enjoys this power of will. No man’s will is that efficacious. Men issue decrees and then hope they will bring about their desired effects. God alone can decree with the necessity of consequence. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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What is Conversion?

Conversion is a U-turn in a person's life. It is turning with one's whole person away from sin and to Christ for salvation. From idol worship to God worship. From self-justification to Christ's justification. From self-rule to God's rule.

Conversion is what happens when God awakens those who are spiritually dead and enables them to repent of their sins and have faith in Christ.

When Jesus calls us to repent and believe, he's calling us to conversion. It's a radical change in what we believe and do. (Mark 1:15)

When Jesus calls us to take up our crosses and follow him, he's calling us to conversion. (Luke 9:23) In order for us to repent, God must give us new life, new hearts, and faith (Ephesians 2:1, Romans 6:17, Colossians 2:13, Ezekiel 36:26, Ephesians 2:8, 2 Timothy 2:25).

Conversion is not:

A one-time event with no implications for how we live. Conversion does happen at one moment, and it is a moment of radical change. Life should look different thereafter. A new battle begins.

A journey with no destination. Conversion may be preceded by a long process for some, but it always involves a committed decision to repent of sin and trust in Christ, which is the immediate result of God giving new life to a spiritually dead sinner.

Optional. Acts 17:30 says that God commands all people everywhere to repent. Conversion can never be forced, but it is absolutely necessary in order to be saved.

A conversation. While Christians should communicate the gospel humbly, our goal is not merely a pleasant exchange of information. We must call everyone to repent of their sin and trust in Christ for salvation.

Saying a formulaic prayer. Conversion certainly involves praying, but we must be careful not to tempt people toward placing their trust in some special set of words. ~ *Mark Dever*

Testing Your Conversion with Humility

Would we know whether we are really converted? Would we know the test by which we must try ourselves? The surest mark of true conversion is humility. If we have really received the Holy Spirit, we shall show it by a meek and childlike spirit. Like children, we shall think humbly of our own strength and wisdom, and be very dependent on our Father in heaven. Like children, we shall not seek great things in this world; and having food and clothing and a Father's love, we shall be content. Truly this is a heart-searching test! It exposes the unsoundness of many a so-called conversion. ~ *J.C. Ryle*



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WEST SUFFOLK BAPTIST CHURCH
ASSOCIATION OF REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCHES OF AMERICA

Birthday and Anniversary Corner - October 2014

Charlene Scofield - 10/3
Mitch Buchta - 10/6
Beth Buchta - 10/6

No anniversaries to report

The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 Of God’s Covenant - Chapter 7

1. The distance between God and His creature man is so great that, although men, endowed as they are with reason, owe obedience to Him as their creator, yet they could never have attained to life as their reward had not God, in an act of voluntary condescension, made this possible by the making of a covenant.
2. Furthermore, since man, by reason of his fall into sin, had brought himself under the curse of God’s law, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace, in which He freely offers life and salvation by Jesus Christ to sinners. On their part He requires faith in Him that they may be saved, and promises to give His Holy Spirit to all those who are elected unto eternal life, in order that they may be made willing and able to believe.
3. God’s covenant is revealed in the gospel; in the first place to Adam in the promise of salvation by ‘the seed of the woman’, and afterwards, step by step, until the full revelation of salvation was completed in the New Testament. The salvation of the elect is based upon a covenant of redemption that was transacted in eternity between the Father and the Son; and it is solely through the grace conveyed by this covenant that all the descendants of fallen Adam who have been saved have obtained life and a blessed immortality; for the terms of blessing which applied to Adam in his state of innocency have no application to his posterity to render them acceptable to God.

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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