



Volume 4 Issue 2

West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



February 2017

Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

THE PRECIOUS BLOOD - Valley of Vision

Blessed Lord Jesus,

Before thy cross I kneel and see
the heinousness of my sin,
my iniquity that caused thee to be
'made a curse',
the evil that excites the severity
of divine wrath.

Show me the enormity of my guilt by
the crown of thorns,
the pierced hands and feet,
the bruised body,
the dying cries.

Thy blood is the blood of incarnate God,
its worth infinite, its value beyond all thought.
Infinite must be the evil and guilt
that demands such a price.

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the crown of thorns,
the pierced hands and feet,
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Thy blood is the blood of incarnate God,
its worth infinite, its value beyond all thought.
Infinite must be the evil and guilt
that demands such a price.

Sinner that I am, why should the sun give me light,
the air supply breath,
the earth bear my tread,
its fruits nourish me,
its creatures subserve my ends?

Yet thy compassions yearn over me,
thy heart hastens to my rescue,
thy love endured my curse,
thy mercy bore my deserved stripes.

Let me walk humbly in the lowest depths of humiliation,
bathed in thy blood,
tender of conscience,
triumphing gloriously as an heir of salvation.



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Teach Them: Who God Is and What He Is Like

How often do we talk to our children about God and His attributes? God's character is revealed throughout the Bible. The passages that specifically describe the attributes of God are fertile for discussion and for prompting searching questions. We should offer our children balanced teaching about the character of God. We could have a study on what God is like using the book *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer, a clear and easy read. We might read a chapter ourselves as a devotional at night, and the next day talk to our children about a particular attribute of God. Three or four weeks on God's attributes would be a very profitable study for children. Children need to know who God is.

A helpful book for very young children is *Tell Me about God* by Susan Harding. This book can help us teach small children about the attributes of God. There are a few places in the book where we might have to put the author's thoughts into our own words, but, for the most part, the book contains very good material about God and how to communicate who He is to children. ~ *This excerpt is taken from Parenting By God's Promises by Dr. Joel Beeke.*

Teach Them: About Hell

Children are not too young to die, and therefore they are not too young to think about what will happen to them when they die. They need to hear about the Father's house with its many mansions and the place that Jesus is preparing there for all who love Him and put their trust in Him for salvation. But our children also need to hear about the wages of sin, the state of eternal death and eternal separation from the love of God that is called hell. We need to explain to them that God's perfect justice requires that sin "committed against the most high majesty of God be punished with everlasting punishment of body and soul" (*Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 4, Q. 11*).

I am not saying that we should talk about hell every day. Rather, we should look for opportune moments. When we find them, we should speak about hell in simple but sober terms. When Andrew Bonar once told his friend Robert Murray M'Cheyne that he had preached about hell, M'Cheyne responded, "Oh, and I trust you did it with tears?" If we speak too casually about hell, our children will view eternal punishment casually. They should sense our seriousness and understand that we truly believe "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (*Hebrews 10:31*).

There are two extremes to avoid concerning the subject of hell. On the one hand, we should avoid an overly graphic approach, dwelling on details of the biblical depictions, such as the frightful screaming, the scorching heat of the fires, and the unquenchable thirst. We should discard altogether the popular idea of the Devil with horns, a suit of red, and a pitchfork in his hand. We should rather focus on the essence of hell, which Christ experienced while hanging on the cross, covered with shame, burdened with our sins, cursed and forsaken by God, given up to the power of death, all alone with none to comfort Him.

On the other hand, some parents are afraid to talk about hell lest their children be frightened and have nightmares, so they avoid the subject altogether. Such parents are guilty of withholding important biblical truth from their children. Did God err when He put the truth about hell on display in His Word?

By all means, we should talk more about heaven than about hell, and more about the way of salvation than about damnation. Salvation is the predominant message of the Bible. But we ought not to shield children from the doctrine of hell or any other discomfiting biblical truth. ~ *This excerpt is taken from Parenting By God's Promises by Dr. Joel Beeke*



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Who Is Lord: Christ or Caesar?

Someday, we will be like Him. That's our hope. But it's not a hope that we put on the shelf, and it's not a hope that sends us into a cave. It's a hope that sends us into the world with confidence. We can be confident in God, confident in His Word, confident in Christ, confident in the gospel, and confident in hope. In the AD 90s, Domitian ruled as emperor over Rome. His cruelty rivaled that of Nero. He insisted that he be worshiped as a god. Christians, of course, could not participate in the rituals of this emperor cult. That left them vulnerable, and that vulnerability led to persecution. It is likely that John's exile to the island of Patmos directly resulted from Domitian's edicts. John refused to bow.

John wrote Revelation during this time, many scholars believe. Also around this time, an early church figure named Clement, serving as bishop at Rome, sent a letter to the church at Corinth. Clement opens his letter by referring to *"the sudden and successive calamitous events."* Persecution rolled over the church like wave after relentless wave. Clement wrote to comfort them and to exhort them to stand firm. Near the middle of his letter, he simply reminds the believers at Corinth that Christ is our leader and we are His soldiers.

Domitian's edict and the persecution that followed served to press an urgent question to the church. This question was there at the very beginning. It was there at the events surrounding the incarnation when Herod ruled. It was there when the soldier drew his sword in the garden of Gethsemane, and it was there all along the excruciating and agonizing road to the cross. The question never left the early decades of the church or even the early centuries of the church. The question was this: Caesar or Christ?

Domitian's edict made that question palpable, even visceral. Statues of him were sent all over the empire. On appointed days, feasts were held, and all of the populace had to pass before the cast image of Domitian and bow before him as god. It was very clear: Caesar or Christ?

The truth is that question is always there. It is always before us, before the church in every age of the past. The question is before us in our time today, and it will be in front of the church in the ages to come. Who is Lord? When the Apostles and the believers in the pages of the New Testament answered that Christ is Lord and Caesar is not, ramifications followed. That decision had consequences. They did not let the temporal consequences overshadow the eternal ones. The author of Hebrews reminds the believers that they had *"endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated"* (Hebrews 10:32–33).

Then he declares in 10:35: *"Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward."*

When the question is put to us, Caesar or Christ, may we be among those who don't shrink back. May we take our stand alongside the first-century church and the church through the centuries. May we not throw away our confidence.

From this singular point of the lordship of Christ came the church's confidence. And also from this point came the church's convictions. Chris Larson, my colleague at Ligonier Ministries, recently made the statement, *"The future belongs to Christians of conviction."*

This is a time for conviction. This is a time for confidence. ~ *Dr. Stephen J. Nichols - Reformation College*



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Joy in Christ Alone

Christianity is a religion of joy. Real joy comes from God, who has invaded us, conquered us, and liberated us from eternal death and sadness—who has given us hope and joy because He has poured out His love within our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us (Romans 5:5). Joy comes from God, not from within. When we look within, we just get sad. We have joy only when we look outside ourselves to Christ. Without Christ, joy is not only hard to find, it's impossible to find. The world desperately seeks joy, but in all the wrong places. However, our joy comes because Christ sought us, found us, and keeps us. We cannot have joy apart from Christ, because it doesn't exist. Joy is not something we can conjure up.

Joy isn't the absence of sadness—it's the presence of the Holy Spirit. And although the Holy Spirit produces joy within us, He often does so by humbling us so that we would take our eyes off ourselves and fix our eyes on Christ (Hebrews 12:2). Real joy exists even amid real sadness, and real joy doesn't always mean there's a smile on our faces. It sometimes means we are on our knees with tears of repentance. Charles Spurgeon admitted, *"I do not know when I am more perfectly happy than when I am weeping for sin at the foot of the cross."* Joy comes in repentance and forgiveness and by daily looking to Christ and living for His glory, not by looking to self and living for our glory. But if we live each day bearing the shame of yesterday and the anxieties of tomorrow, we will never experience the joys of today. So let us always be quick to run to the cross to seek the joy that only Christ can give, for trying to find joy apart from Christ is like trying to find day without the sun.

Christ was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief in order that we might have fullness of joy, now and forever. This is why the first answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism teaches us that *"man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."* C.S. Lewis rightly said that *"joy is the serious business of heaven."* But having real joy that comes from enjoying God is not something we will experience only in heaven. It is what we experience now. For the greatest joy in this life is to know that our greatest joy is not in this life but in the one to come. We live each day in light of our hope for the future, when Christ *"will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away"* (Revelation 21). And when we see Christ, He will dry every tear from our eyes—not just our tears of sadness, but our tears of joy as well. Otherwise, we would never be able to see Him. ~ **Burk Parson - Editor of Tabletalk Magazine and Co-Pastor - Saint Andrews Chapel - Sanford, Florida.**

Is Christ Enough?

In the letter he wrote to the Colossians, Paul had to deal with a false teaching that scholars often refer to as "the heresy of Colossae." This designation is due to the unique character of the teaching and the fact that it seems to have flourished only in that region. It was a combination of Jewish elements with ascetic and mystical practices—all connected by an incipient Gnosticism. Its supporters had managed to infiltrate the Christian churches in Colossae and probably churches of other cities located in the Lycus River Valley as well. We have no evidence that this sect settled in other places.

It seems that the appeal of this dangerous sect to the Christians was the promise made of fullness, perfection, and satisfaction in God by a certain knowledge (gnōsis) that had not been previously revealed by the ministry of the Apostles of Jesus Christ.



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Is Christ Enough?- Continued

This gnōsis involved Jewish practices such as circumcision, their dietary laws and their religious calendar, together with ascetic practices and mystical worship based on contact with the angels. We can deduce that the Christians at Colossae had begun to listen to the proponents of these ideas. Paul writes this letter in order to prevent them from fully adopting these teachings.

The Centrality of Christ

The central argument of Paul in the letter is that in Jesus Christ, Christians already have everything that the sect falsely offered: wholeness, fullness, perfection, and satisfaction in God. In other words, Paul responds to false teachers by presenting the sufficiency of Christ.

Paul's argument is first presented from the person of Christ. He is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15) in whom, through whom, and for whom all things were created (v. 16). He is before all things; in Him all things are held together (v. 17). He is the firstborn from the dead who takes precedence over all things (v. 18). It pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell (v. 19), and through Him God should reconcile all things to Himself (v. 20). In Christ dwells the whole fullness of deity (2:9).

As a result of being united to Christ, believers have already received graciously from God perfection, wholeness, fullness, and satisfaction. The ultimate *gnōsis* of God is actually in Christ. He is the mystery of God, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:2–3), something infinitely superior to the *gnōsis* offered by the false teachers.

The Superiority of Christ

The teaching of these teachers was based on subtle philosophical arguments. Among them was what Paul calls the "elemental spirits of the world," a possible reference to spiritual, angelic beings who, according to Gnostic teaching, dominated the planets and other celestial bodies and filled the space (fullness) between men and God, functioning as mediators. Paul's answer to this teaching is that in Christ dwells the fullness of deity bodily (2:8–9). Jesus Christ is God Himself incarnate as a man. There is no need for angelic mediators to reach up to God and reach perfection. Those who are in Christ by faith are already perfected (v. 10).

Similarly, requirements like the practice of the works of the law are unnecessary. Circumcision has been fulfilled through the baptism in Jesus' name and is a superior circumcision (vv. 11–12). In His life, Christ fulfilled all the requirements of the law for His people. On the cross, He paid their debt (v. 14). The works of the law, such as dietary rules and the keeping of holy days, were like a shadow cast by the body of Christ, and once the body arrived, the shadow became unnecessary (v. 17).

Christ also triumphed over the principalities and powers, the angelic beings that, according to Gnostic teaching, dominated the basic elements of the universe (v. 15). Therefore, believers should reject the idea that it is necessary to worship the angels. Such teaching is the result of hallucinations of a sensuous mind (v. 18). In Christ, believers are dead to the "elemental spirits of the world" (v. 20).



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Is Christ Enough?- Continued

The Sufficiency of Christ

And finally, the ascetic practices demanded by the false teachers as necessary to dominate sensuality and other sinful passions are useless. Actually, the ascetic rigor exhibited by the proponents of this teaching is self-worship or self-made religion. It has no power to stop the passions of the flesh (vv. 20–23). However, through union with Christ in His death and resurrection, believers can mortify the flesh and live for God (3:1–17).

Thus, Paul teaches the believers in Colossae that Jesus Christ is sufficient to meet all the needs of those who are His. Christ satisfies our thirst for wholeness. He satisfies our longing to know God, our deepest yearnings to be full. By daily communion with Christ through the means of grace, we find full satisfaction for all our needs. This satisfaction enables the Christian to serve God here in this world with a heart full of fervor and dedication. A happy heart in Christ empowers the believer to overcome sin and dedicate himself entirely to the service of his Lord and Redeemer. ~ *Dr. Augustus Nicodemus Lopes is senior pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Goiânia, Brazil, and vice president of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil.*

Joy versus Happiness

Not long ago it was common to see bumper stickers proclaiming every conceivable source for happiness. One said, "Happiness is being married." Another countered, "Happiness is being single." One cynical sticker read, "Happiness is impossible!"

For most people happiness is possible but it's also fickle, shallow, and fleeting. As the word itself implies, happiness is associated with happenings, happenstance, luck, and fortune. If circumstances are favorable, you're happy. If not, you're unhappy.

Christian joy, however, is directly related to God and is the firm confidence that all is well, regardless of your circumstances.

In **Philippians 3:1** Paul says, "Rejoice *in the Lord*" (emphasis added). The Lord is both the source and object of Christian joy. Knowing Him brings joy that transcends temporal circumstances. Obeying Him brings peace and assurance.

Joy is God's gift to every believer. It is the fruit that His Spirit produces within you (Galatians 5:22) from the moment you receive the gospel (John 15:11). It increases as you study and obey God's Word (1 John 1:4).

Even severe trials needn't rob your joy. James 1:2 says you should be joyful when you encounter various trials because trials produce spiritual endurance and maturity. They also prove that your faith is genuine, and a proven faith is the source of great joy (1 Peter 1:6-8).

You live in a world corrupted by sin. But your hope is in a living God, not a dying world. He is able to keep you from stumbling and make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy (Jude 24). That's your assurance of future glory and eternal joy! Until that time, don't neglect His Word, despise trials, or lose sight of your eternal reward. They are key ingredients of your present joy. ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*

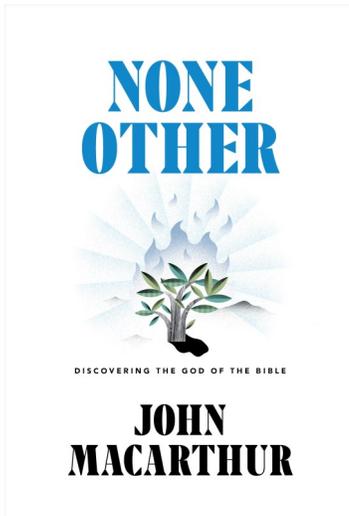


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Book Reviews

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.

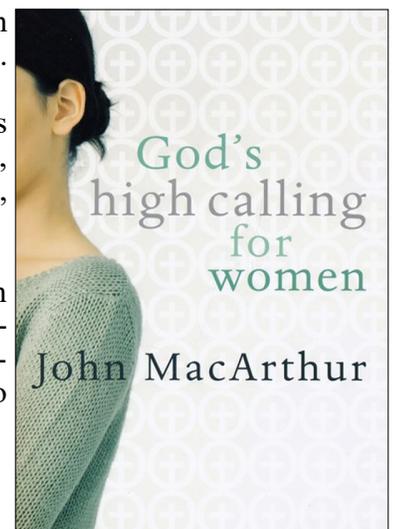
In *None Other: Discovering the God of the Bible*, Dr. John MacArthur shows that the best way to discover the one true God is not through philosophical discourse but through a careful study of Scripture - the primary place where God has chosen to reveal Himself.

God's High Calling for Women *Dr. John MacArthur*

Women are not inferior to men—so why does the church sometimes treat women as less capable or valued than men? It shouldn't.

But what does God expect from women in the church? And why do the answers seem to cause so much tension? John MacArthur studies attitude, appearance, testimony, design, and contribution, all from First Timothy 2:9-15. If followed, God's plan results in blessing, unity, and glory for Him.

Complete with questions for review and thoughts for reflection at the end of each section, this thorough, insightful, yet concise study on the important and controversial subject of women in the church will serve as an excellent resource for personal or group study. This book can be used alongside or apart from the audio series available from Grace to You.





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How Can Churches Grow in Holiness?

One of the miracles of our salvation is that God makes us into his very own home. Most of us would pass on such lousy building material. But God, being the master builder he is, lays Christ the cornerstone and then transforms rotten lumber into a *holy* temple. Ephesians 2:22 speaks of this wonder, “*In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*” God sanctifies individuals and He sanctifies churches. But *how* does He grow churches in holiness? The question is an important one; there is a lot on the line. The 1689 Baptist Confession says, “*The purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error. Some have degenerated so much that they have ceased to be churches of Christ and have become synagogues of Satan*” (2LBC 26.3). How might churches avoid such degeneration and welcome the refining work of a holy God? Here are *three* principles for how local churches can grow in holiness:

1. **Churches do well to remember they have been called for the purpose of holiness.** God’s effectual call of the elect must serve as the foundation for the church’s pursuit of holiness. Jesus says in John 10:16, “*I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*” With this call, God works grace in his people as “*He takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh. He renews their wills and by His almighty power turns them to good and effectually draws them to Jesus Christ*” (2LBC 10:1). If a church neglects this call, or even downplays it in the teaching ministry of the church, then that church will be liable to fall into ditch-despair on one side or ditch-pride on the other as they walk sanctification’s path. How wise our 17th century Baptist brothers were to include this line regarding the church in their confession: “*They are called so that they will live before Him in all the ways of obedience that He prescribes for them in His Word*” (2LBC 26:5).

2. **Churches should promote the value of their public worship.** Corporate worship is *vital* to the church. If a church stops meeting together for worship, it dies. One Baptist theologian demonstrates this point in his very definition of a local church: “A Christian church is an assembly of believers in Christ, organized into a body, according to the Holy Scriptures *for the worship* and service of God.” Many churches, today, seek for a niche in the ecclesiological market. The temptation is strong to find a new add-on, program, retreat or initiative that will really serve to mature people. Such things can be helpful, but unduly elevating them distracts churches from the bread and butter corporate worship to which they have been called; the corporate worship that week in and week out serves to sanctify them. When the church gathers on the Lord’s Day for the preaching, reading, praying, singing and seeing (through the ordinances) of God’s Word, the holy house gets built.

3. **Churches grow in holiness through governing themselves biblically.** A church full of good people with no way to keep out the wolves is on the path to becoming one of Satan’s synagogues. Regenerate church membership, including the practices of credobaptism (front door) and excommunication (back door), serves the long-term purity of a local church. We are wise not to diminish church government for “To every church... [Christ] has given all power and authority that is in any way necessary to conduct the form of worship and discipline that He has instituted for them to observe. He has also given them commands and rules, to use and carry out that power rightly and properly” (2LBC 26:7). If a church takes this Christ-given authority seriously, members will devote themselves to God’s Word and one another. If you find a church devoting themselves to God’s Word and one another, you will find a church growing in holiness.



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*“Thoughtfully Reformed -
Redemptively Relevant”*

Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Birthday and Anniversary Corner - February 2017

Birthdays

None to Report

Anniversaries

*Jonathan and April F (5)
Mike and Rose M (17)*

Embracing Our Mission

A church that cares not for truth is a community that rejects its very mission. The person who says, “I’m not interested in doctrine or theology,” is not “of the truth.” He or she has missed the voice of Jesus.

For the church to be the church, she must bow before her King and embrace the mission He has given to her. Yes, we desire a cultural reformation and a restoration of public morality. But that is secondary to and dependent on our mission to bear witness to the truth. Doctrine is important because its central concern is for an understanding of truth, without which there can be no godliness. It is the truth that sets us free, reforms our behavior, and defines us as disciples of Christ.

The world does not see or understand the city of God. It is a hidden city, a concealed kingdom. It is veiled by falsehood, by he who seeks to obscure the truth. The truth is that at this moment Jesus is the King of kings. This world is under His dominion. We are citizens in His realm. We must not negotiate or retreat from that affirmation. The kingdom of God comprises those people who believe what God says and obey when God commands. ~ *Dr. R. C. Sproul, Sr.*

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.



West Suffolk Leadership

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.
Office: 1001 Kenyon Court, Suffolk, VA 23435; **E-Mail:** pastorscofield@gmail.com
Website: www.westsuffolkbc.com **Phone/Fax:** 757-539-0363
Teaching Pastor/Elder: Ben Scofield, pastorscofield@gmail.com
Teaching Elders: Mike Myers, Mike Prince and Scott Thomas
Deacons: Marlin Halsey, John Hurst and John McPhatter
Editor: Walt Lawrence, gwlclf0415@gmail.com

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.