



Volume 4 Issue 1

West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



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Comprehending the Course of History

What is striking in this history is the manifest hand of providence in the work of redemption. God is a God of long-range planning. He does not succumb to the all-too-human tendency toward immediate gratification and short-term goals.

God sees the end from the beginning and rules the course of history, moving it inexorably toward its appointed destiny. In the affairs of the life of Abraham, God was providentially directing history toward David’s kingship and far beyond to the kingship of Christ.

The genealogies show that the first advent of Christ was not an afterthought in God’s mind, a sudden quick-fix remedy for a world run amok. Rather, it displays a marvelous drama of redemption that God ordained before the foundation of the world and gradually but surely brought to pass in the footnotes of history.

All who rejoice in the first advent are comforted by the certainty of the promised second advent. We, as twenty-first-century Christians, live in an interim period—the time between two advents that define, condition, and redeem the meaning of our lives. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. - Chairman of Ligonier Ministries and co-pastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla.*

God Never Forgets Us

We are a forgetful people. We too often overlook the majesty of creation and how it directs our gaze to our sovereign, holy, and gracious Creator. We forget to give God glory for creating us and for sustaining us. We forget to thank Him for all blessings. We forget to pray to Him, and we forget to praise Him. We forget His steadfast and abounding love. We forget what Christ has done for us, in us, and through us. We forget Christ’s law-fulfilling life, and we forget His sacrificial, atoning death. We forget His resurrection, and we forget that we are awaiting resurrection. We forget that Christ is interceding for us at the right hand of the Father. We forget that Christ is coming back to judge the living and the dead. We forget that God is all-knowing and knows the intentions of our hearts. We forget the person and power of the Holy Spirit. We forget that the Holy Spirit dwells within us and that we are the temple of God. We forget that God is at work in us both to will and to work according to His good pleasure. We forget that God is working all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. We forget that we are united to Christ and that our salvation is secure in Christ. We forget that we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We forget that God will make all things new in the new heaven and new earth. We forget God’s promises. We forget the law. We forget the gospel. We forget God’s faithfulness. And yet, God never forgets us.

Throughout Scripture, our faithful, covenant Lord reminds us, “I will remember” (Genesis 9:15; Leviticus 26:42; Ezekiel 16:60). He will not forget us and His everlasting promises to us. And though we are prone to wander and forget God, God has promised that He will never allow us to forget Him in the end. In order to help us remember Him, our Lord has provided us with abundant means to remember Him.



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God Never Forgets Us - Continued

The Lord has given us His inspired, authoritative, and inerrant Word, and He has given us the ability to know it, to love it, and to hide it in our hearts. Moreover, the Lord has given us Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ. As God incarnate, Christ is the eternal Word, the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3). And foundational to knowing Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit who has made us know Christ by conquering, quickening, and liberating our hearts.

If God were to let us forget Him finally, there would be no inheritance for His Son. But because God remembers our sin no more in Christ, He will, for the sake of Christ, cause us to remember Him now and forever, for His glory and our eternal good. ~ *Burk Parsons - Editor of Tabletalk magazine and serves as co-pastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla.*

Avoiding a Hardened Conscience

We are warned not to allow ourselves to become hardened, because if we look at the whole concept of hardening in its biblical perspective, we see that something happens to us through repeated sins. Our consciences become seared. The more we commit a particular sin, the less remorse we feel from it. Our hearts are recalcitrant through repeated disobedience.

When God hardens the heart, all He does is step away and stop striving with us. For example, the first time I commit a particular sin, my conscience bothers me. In His grace, God is convicting me of that evil. God is intruding into my life, trying to persuade me to stop this wickedness. If He wants to harden me, all He has to do is to stop rebuking me, stop nudging me, and just give me enough rope to hang myself.

We see in Scripture that when God hardens hearts, He does not force people to sin; rather, He gives them their freedom to exercise the evil of their own desires (James 1:13–15). ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*

Defining God’s Will

“It is the will of God.” How easily these words fall from the lips or flow from the pen. How difficult it is to penetrate exactly what they mean. Few concepts in theology generate more confusion than the will of God.

One problem we face is rooted in the multifaceted way in which the term will functions in biblical expressions. The Bible uses the expression “the will of God” in various ways. We encounter two different Greek words in the New Testament (boule and thelema), both of which are capable of several nuances. They encompass such ideas as the counsel of God, the plan of God, the decrees of God, the disposition or attitude of God, as well as other nuances.

Augustine once remarked, “In some sense, God wills everything that happens.” The immediate question raised by this comment is, In what sense? How does God “will” the presence of evil and suffering? Is He the immediate cause of evil? Does He do evil? God forbid. Yet evil is a part of His creation. If He is sovereign over the whole of His creation, we must face the conundrum: How is evil related to the divine will?

Questions like this one make distinctions necessary—sometimes fine distinctions, even technical distinctions—with respect to the will of God. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



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The Right to Be a Christian

Moral revolutions require legal revolutions. This is certainly the case with the sexual revolution and its various causes of sexual liberation. A revolution is only complete when the legal structure aligns itself with a new moral understanding. This alignment is exactly what is taking place in American public life on the issue of gay liberation.

Every society has a structure of systems that either influence or coerce behavior. Eventually, societies move to legislate and regulate behavior in order to align the society with what is commonly, or at least largely, considered morally right and wrong. Civilization could not survive without a system of moral controls and influences.

Throughout almost all of Western history, this process has played out in a non-threatening way for the Christian church and Christians in the larger society. So long as the moral judgment of the culture matched the convictions and teachings of the church, the church and culture were not at odds in the courts. Furthermore, under these conditions, to be found on the wrong side of a moral assessment was unlikely for Christians.

All that began to change in the modern age as the culture became more secularized and as Western societies moved more progressively distant from the Christian morality they had embraced in the past. Christians in this generation recognize that we do not represent the same moral framework now pervasively presented in academia, the creative culture, and the arena of law. The secularization of public life and the separation of society from its Christian roots have left many Americans seemingly unaware of the fact that the very beliefs and teachings for which Christians are now criticized were once considered not only mainstream beliefs, but essential to the entire project of society. As the sexual revolution pervades society, and as the issues raised by the efforts of gay liberation and the legalization of same-sex marriage come to the fore, Christians now face an array of religious liberty challenges that were inconceivable in previous generations.

In one of the most important of these cases, a judge found that a wedding photographer broke the law by refusing to serve at a same-sex wedding. In an incredibly revealing decision, the court stated that the religious liberties of the photographer would indeed be violated by coerced participation in a same-sex wedding. Nevertheless, the court found that the new morality trumped concern for religious liberty.

Similarly, we have seen religious institutions, especially colleges and schools, confronted by demands that amount to a surrender to the sexual revolution with regard to nondiscrimination on the basis of sex, sexual behavior, and sexual orientation. In some jurisdictions, lawmakers are contemplating hate crime legislation that would marginalize and criminalize speech that is in conflict with the new moral consensus.

We now face an inevitable conflict of liberties. In this context of acute and radical moral change, the conflict of liberties is excruciating, immense, and eminent.

In this case, the conflict of liberties means that the new moral regime, with the backing of the courts and the regulatory state, will prioritize erotic liberty over religious liberty. Over the course of the last several decades, we have seen this revolution coming. Erotic liberty has been elevated as a right more fundamental than religious liberty. Erotic liberty now marginalizes, subverts, and neutralizes religious liberty—a liberty highly prized by the builders of this nation and its constitutional order.



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The Right to Be a Christian - Continued

We must remember that the framers of the Constitution did not believe they were creating rights but rather acknowledging rights given to all humanity by “nature and nature’s God.”

The religious liberty challenge we now face consigns every believer, every religious institution, and every congregation in the arena of conflict where erotic liberty and religious liberty now clash. This poses no danger to theological liberals and their churches and denominations because those churches have accommodated themselves to the new morality and find themselves quite comfortable. Furthermore, some of these liberal denominations and churches style themselves as defenders of the new morality and actually advocate legal modifications that restrict the religious liberty rights of more conservative churches and denominations.

Interestingly, Jonathan Rauch, one of the early advocates of gay marriage, warned his fellow moral revolutionaries that they must be careful lest they trample upon the conscience rights and religious liberty of their adversaries. In his book, *Kindly Inquisitors: The New Attacks on Free Thought*, Rauch voiced his concern:

Today, I fear that many people on my side of the gay-equality question are forgetting our debt to the system that freed us. Some gay people—not all, not even most, but quite a few—want to expunge discriminatory views. “Discrimination is discrimination and bigotry is bigotry,” they say, “and they are intolerable whether or not they happen to be someone’s religion or moral creed.”

Rauch also stated, “I hope that when gay people—and non-gay people—encounter hateful or discriminatory opinions, we respond not by trying to silence or punish them but by trying to correct them.” There are few signs that Rauch’s admonition is being heard. A review of the religious liberty challenges already confronting the conscience, conduct, and belief rights of convictional Christians shows us how daunting all this really is. We can be sure this is not the end of our struggle. It is only the beginning. ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. - President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary**

Knowing the Bible in Your Time of Need

I want people to fill their minds with passages of Scripture while they are well and strong, that they may have sure help in the day of need. I want them to be diligent in studying their Bibles, and becoming familiar with their contents, in order that the grand old Book may stand by them and talk with them when all earthly friends fail. From the bottom of my heart, I pity that person who never reads their Bible. I wonder how they expect to draw their consolation in their time of need.

Let us learn the high authority of the Bible, and the immense value of a knowledge of its contents. Let us read it, search into it, pray over it, diligently and with perseverance. Let us strive to be so thoroughly acquainted with its pages, that its text may abide in our memories, and stand ready at our right hand in the day of need. ~ **J.C. Ryle**



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And Nothing But the Truth

God never intended His people to worship Him apart from the use of their minds. Real spirituality begins with a precise understanding of truth. Yet I see much of contemporary Christianity heading down the paths of mystical experience and fantasy.

That was illustrated in an article I once read in the Los Angeles Times:

PASADENA, Calif. - Under the militant banner of "spiritual warfare," a growing number of evangelical and charismatic Christian leaders are preparing broad assaults on what they call the cosmic powers of darkness. Fascinated with the notion that Satan commands a hierarchy of territorial demons, some mission agencies and big-church pastors are devising strategies for "breaking the strongholds" of those evil spirits alleged to be controlling cities and countries. Some proponents in the fledgling movement already claim focused prayer meetings ended the curse of the Bermuda Triangle, led to the 1985 downfall of guru Baghwan Shree Rajneesh and produced a two-week drop in crime and freeway traffic in Los Angeles for the 1984 Olympics. Fuller Seminary professor C. Peter Wagner, who has written extensively on the subject, led a so called summit meeting on cosmic-level spiritual warfare ... in Pasadena, Calif. Two dozen men and women took part, including a Texas couple who head a group called the "Generals of Intercession" and an Oregon man who conducts "spiritual warfare boot camps." In his opening remarks, Wagner said, "If you do not know what you are doing, and few ... have the necessary expertise, Satan will eat you for breakfast."

I am fearful that this type of mindset is just one example of how the church has fallen victim to the New Age Movement, a thinly veiled form of Hindu mysticism. It is belief in everything, and a belief in nothing - with no distinction between reality and fantasy.

Much of the professing church is in perfect harmony with the New Age movement's spirit of anti-intellectualism. For example, the Roman Catholic Church emphasizes ritual - a mechanical anti-intellectualism in which mystical ceremony replaces intelligent worship. Here Scripture becomes subservient to the church.

Liberal Protestants have emphasized social reform - a political anti-intellectualism produced by the despair of trying to find truth without submitting to the authority of Scripture as the standard for ruling the church.

Charismatics have long emphasized subjectivism - an experiential anti-intellectualism that is the product of weak theology and a careless handling of Scripture.

Those trends all contribute to a kind of mindless, mystical Christianity that is the antithesis of God's design for His church.

That's why I'm so concerned. A seminary professor claims that if we don't learn some mysterious techniques of spiritual warfare, Satan will eat us for breakfast! Is that true? The apostle Peter said, "Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). But the context is calling for sobriety and vigilance, not a mystical cosmic warfare strategy.



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And Nothing But the Truth - Continued

Some suggest all we need to do is bind Satan - just say, "Satan, I bind you," and he is caught. They cite Matthew 12:29, where Jesus says, "How can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

But Jesus was dispelling the Pharisees' foolish accusation that He worked under Satan's power (Matthew 12:27-28), not relating a scenario whereby believers could "bind" Satan. He used the illustration of a thief, who, planning to rob a strong man's house while the man was there, would first have to bind him or risk being arrested and beaten. Jesus' point was that He had demonstrated to the Pharisees and all Israel His power over Satan and the kingdom of evil. Only God has the power and authority to enter the very house of Satan, successfully bind him, and carry off his property. Even Paul was hindered by Satan (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Are we to assume he didn't know the correct formula?

There is no magic phrase or mantra we can say that will bind Satan, but God has not left us without a divine strategy for dealing with him. God's strategy centers on objective truth, not subjective experience. It begins with sound doctrine, not cabalistic technique. Yet ironically, those who talk most about warfare against Satan often minimize the importance of doctrine.

In Ephesians 6:11 Paul says, "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." What is our armor? It consists of the belt of truthfulness (not merely knowing the truth, but being committed to it), the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace (confidence that we have made peace with God), the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation (confidence in our security in Christ), and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. None of those hints at any secret technique. Rather, they speak of clear understanding and a solid commitment to biblical truth and holiness.

When we resist Satan by taking our stand in the armor of God's truth, he flees. James 4:7 says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Peter said, "Resist him, firm in the faith" (1 Peter 5:9, emphasis added) - firm in the Christian faith, which is the revealed truth. This is objective truth, not some unseen cosmic force. Since Satan is a deceiver and a liar, we can successfully resist him only by knowing and obeying the truth.

Paul said, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Again, we don't battle Satan with magic words and imaginary forces; we rely on the power of His truth as it brings even our thoughts captive to our Lord. That is genuine and ultimate victory over satanic forces.

No matter how Satan attacks, the solution is the same. We stand in the truth. We don't need to learn hidden strategies to fight Satan. God's truth is the supreme weapon against the father of lies (cf. John 8:44). Only when we know the truth and commit ourselves to obey it will we stand strong. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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Churches in Israel: Proclaiming the True Messiah



Too often Israel takes the forefront of the news and social media because of a terrorist attack, the issue of settlements, or a related political issue. Unfortunately, these negative headlines obscure something wonderful: God is on the move in Israel.

The church in Israel is a paradox. Christianity began among the Israelites, yet the Christian church has been almost non-existent among Jewish people for nearly 2,000 years—and this despite the fact that there have always been Jewish people, even prominent rabbis, who believed in Jesus as their Lord and Messiah.

However, since the revival of the Hebrew language in the eighteenth century and Israel's establishment as a state in 1948, the

church has become vibrant once again. The restoration of the land and language has paved a way for the restoration of God's people here in Israel.

GROWING ZEAL FOR THE GOSPEL

The church is growing slowly and steadily, even though less than one percent of the population has been converted. Because of this, evangelism is atop the agenda for many churches.

Yet the ground is hard. Many Jewish people see Christianity as the enemy of the Jewish people. Hitler was a "Christian," so many Jews believe their people were persecuted and killed by "Christians." In this context, evangelism is challenging. But in recent years, we've seen a more positive attitude toward Jewish Christian believers in Israeli media and society.

We've also recently seen those from younger generations come to faith. In the last year or so, our church has baptized young men or women every few months, and I've heard of similar occurrences in other churches. Some of these young converts are zealous not only to become active in the church, but to deepen their understanding of the Scriptures. A few even want to pursue theological studies. How encouraging to see Israeli churches taking teaching and preaching more seriously, to see biblical ideas like a plurality of elders being practiced more and more.

As the church has grown, churches have also become more involved in impacting society. From drug and alcohol rehab to soup kitchens, Christians are becoming known in Israel for their service to the needy and their positive impact on society. We pray the Lord will use these acts of service to draw people to himself.

A CHURCH IN NEED OF THEOLOGICAL TOOLS

Despite these encouraging trends, the church in Israel still faces many challenges. Most pastors have little formal theological study, much less a degree. For Hebrew speakers, there's only one Israeli Bible college available where both Jews and Arabs can study theology.

Expository preaching isn't as common as it should be, though it's gaining more and more ground in certain congregations. Because most churches can't afford to pay a full-time pastor, many pastors in Israel have to work a non-ministry job or for a Christian parachurch organization.



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Churches in Israel: Proclaiming the True Messiah - Continued

There's also a great need for solid theological books. Due to the lack of Christian tradition in this part of the world, there simply aren't many Christian books in Hebrew—either translations or original material. Most of the 66 books of the Bible don't have a commentary, and there are no faithful systematic theologies or introductions to the Old or New Testament. We also lack books on the life and the health of the church.

A CHURCH WRESTLING WITH ITS IDENTITY

While most Israeli churches don't have a written confession of faith, most would identify themselves with one of the more common theological streams: Charismatic, Pentecostal, Dispensational, Messianic, or Reformed.

Church membership isn't practiced as it should be, nor is church discipline. Like many other churches, the church where I serve has a basic baptismal class for new converts. We usually interview the candidate, wait to see him in the church for a while, and then invite them to participate in this class. At the end, we interview them again and only then will we conduct the baptism. All of these steps together are comparatively rigorous. While other Reformed churches have similar methods, they're rarely this elaborate—and frankly, meaningful church membership is generally not practiced here.

Another challenge the Israeli church faces is the issue of identity. In light of the harsh history of the “church” toward Jewish people, many want to distance themselves from “church,” “Christianity,” and other similar words that have left hard-to-forget memories. For example, my family often asks me, “How can you believe in Jesus when so many of our people have been killed and persecuted in his name?” Though I know in Christ we are one new man, at times it is hard to be identified with “Gentile” Christianity.

Nonetheless, we are brothers and sisters. And one day, people from every tribe, language, people, and nation will gather together to partake of the great feast of the Lamb.

Please pray for the church in Israel—those who serve it, and those who are a part of it. ~ **David Zadok - Pastor of Grace and Truth Christian Congregation in Israel.**

A Farmer in a Flood

A farmer is in Iowa during a flood. The river is overflowing, with water surrounding the farmer's home up to his front porch. As he is standing there, a boat comes up, and the man in the boat says "Jump in, I'll take you to safety." The farmer crosses his arms and says stubbornly, "Nope, I put my trust in God." The boat goes away. The water rises to the second floor. Another boat comes up, the man says to the farmer who is now in the second story window, "Jump in, I'll save you."

The farmer again says, "Nope, I put my trust in God." The boat goes away. Now the water is up to the roof. As the farmer stands on the roof, a helicopter comes over, and drops a ladder. The pilot yells down to the farmer "I'll save you, climb the ladder." The farmer says "Nope, I put my trust in God." The helicopter goes away. The water continues to rise and sweeps the farmer off the roof. He drowns. The farmer goes to heaven. God sees him and says "What are you doing here?" The farmer says "I put my trust in you and you let me down." God says, "What do you mean, let you down? I sent you two boats and a helicopter!!!" ~ **Anonymous**



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Birthday and Anniversary Corner - January 2017

Birthdays

*Marcie S (9)
Muriel R (24)
Mike S (25)
Stephen H - (26)*

Anniversaries

None to Report

Food for Thought

A Joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones ~ *Proverbs 17:22*

Do all the good you can; by all the means you can; in all the ways you can; in all the places you can; at all the times you can; to all the people you can; as long as you ever can ~ *John Wesley*

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled; nor where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes up short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. ~ *Theodore Roosevelt*

Disclaimer

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