



Volume 4 Issue 7

West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



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Doing Your Duty

The human ear is a strange appendage. Ears come in all sizes and shapes; they are the delight of the cartoonist, who can capture caricatures easily by exaggerating their angles. The appendix and the coccyx have been dubbed “vestigial appendices” by those convinced of their relatively useless functional value. No one has ever called the ear “vestigial,” as its value is not so much cosmetic but functional. Jesus put it succinctly: *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

We are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable responsibilities, among which are love, obedience, and the pursuit of vocation. These may be summed up with one four-letter word that has become a modern-day obscenity: duty. Duty involves answering a summons, responding to an obligation, and heeding a call.

Our ears are assaulted daily by a cacophony of sounds making it difficult at times to distinguish between a bona fide call and senseless noise. We get phone calls, fire calls, wake-up calls, cat calls, crank calls, house calls, bad calls (by referees), and late calls for dinner. We get calls from our bosses, our teachers, and Uncle Sam; calls to departure gates, sales calls, and nature calls.

Only one call carries the force of absolute and ultimate obligation. I may ignore my phone calls and defy even the call of Uncle Sam, fleeing to Canada while nursing a hope for future amnesty. The call of God may also be ignored or disobeyed, but never with impunity. I may marry Betty or Sally and live in Chicago or Tuscaloosa. I may build a small house or a big house, or even live in an apartment. I can drive a Cadillac or a Honda—it’s a free country. With respect to vocation, however, it is not a free universe. One absolute, nonnegotiable requirement of my life is that I be true to my vocation. This is my duty. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*

Responding to God’s Call

We live in daily submission to a host of authorities who circumscribe our freedom: from parents to traffic police officers to dog catchers. All authorities are to be respected and, as the Bible declares, honored. But only one authority has the intrinsic right to bind the conscience. God alone imposes absolute obligation, and He does it by the power of His holy voice.

He calls the world into existence by divine imperative, by holy fiat. He calls the dead and rotting Lazarus to life again. He calls people who were no people “My people.” He calls us out of darkness and into light. He effectually calls us to redemption. He calls us to service.

Our vocation is so named because of its Latin root *vocatio*, “a calling.” The term vocational choice is a contradiction in terms to the Christian. To be sure, we do choose it and can, in fact, choose to disobey it. But prior to the choice and hovering with absolute power over it is the divine summons, the imposition to duty from which we dare not flee.



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Responding to God's Call - Cont'd

It was vocation that drove Jonah on his flight to Tarshish and caused his terrified shipmates to dump him in the sea to still the vengeful tempest. It was vocation that elicited the anguished cry from Paul, “*Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel*” (1 Corinthians 9:16). It was vocation that put a heinous cup of bitterness in the hands of Jesus.

The call of God is not always to a glamorous vocation, and its fruit in this world is often bittersweet. Yet God calls us according to our gifts and talents, and directs us to paths of the most useful service to His kingdom. How impoverished we would be if Jonah had made it to Tarshish, if Paul had refused to preach, if Jeremiah really had turned in his prophet's card, or if Jesus had politely declined the cup. Think about it ... what will be the tab of spiritual losses if you do not respond to God's call? ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*

The Antidote to Anemic Worship

Evangelical Christians have been especially attentive to worship in recent years, sparking a renaissance of thought and conversation on what worship really is and how it should be done. Even if this renewed interest has unfortunately resulted in what some have called the “worship wars” in some churches, it seems that what A.W. Tozer once called the “missing jewel” of evangelical worship is being recovered.

Nevertheless, if most evangelicals would quickly agree that worship is central to the life of the church, there would be no consensus to an unavoidable question: *What is central to Christian worship?* Historically, the more liturgical churches have argued that the sacraments or ordinances form the heart of Christian worship. These churches argue that the elements of the Lord's Supper and the water of baptism most powerfully present the gospel. Among evangelicals, some see evangelism as the heart of worship and therefore plan every facet of the service—songs, prayers, the sermon—with the evangelistic invitation in mind.

Though most evangelicals mention the preaching of the Word as a necessary or customary part of worship, the prevailing model of worship in evangelical churches is increasingly defined by music, along with innovations such as drama and video presentations. When preaching the Word retreats, a host of entertaining innovations will take its place.

Traditional norms of worship are now subordinated to a demand for relevance and creativity. A media-driven culture of images has replaced the word-centered culture that gave birth to the Reformation churches. In some sense, the image-driven culture of modern evangelicalism is an embrace of the very practices rejected by the Reformers in their quest for true biblical worship.

Music fills the space of most evangelical worship, and much of this music comes in the form of contemporary choruses marked by precious little theological content. Beyond the popularity of the chorus as a musical form, many evangelical churches seem intensely concerned to replicate studio-quality musical presentations.

In terms of musical style, the more traditional churches feature large choirs—often with orchestras—and may even sing the established hymns of the faith. Professional staff and an army of volunteers spend much of the week in rehearsals and practice sessions.



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The Antidote to Anemic Worship - Cont'd

All this is not lost on the congregation. Some Christians shop for churches that offer the worship style and experience that fit their expectations. Those dissatisfied with what they find at one church can quickly move to another, sometimes using the language of self-expression to explain that the new church “meets our needs” or “allows us to worship.”

A concern for true biblical worship was at the very heart of the Reformation. But even Martin Luther, who wrote hymns and required his preachers to be trained in song, would not recognize this modern preoccupation with music above all else as legitimate or healthy. Why? Because the Reformers were convinced that the heart of true biblical worship is the preaching of the Word of God.

Thanks be to God, evangelism does take place in Christian worship. Confronted by the presentation of the gospel and the preaching of the Word, sinners are drawn to Christ in faith and the offer of salvation is presented to all. Likewise, the Lord’s Supper and baptism are honored as ordinances by the Lord’s own command, and each finds its place in true worship. But music is not the central act of Christian worship, and neither is evangelism or even the ordinances. The heart of Christian worship is the authentic preaching of the Word of God.

Expository preaching is central, irreducible, and nonnegotiable to the Bible’s mission of authentic worship that pleases God.

The centrality of preaching is the theme of both testaments of Scripture. In Nehemiah 8, we find the people demanding that Ezra the scribe bring the book of the law to the assembly. Interestingly, the text explains that Ezra and those assisting him “read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8). This remarkable text presents a portrait of expository preaching. Once the text was read, it was carefully explained to the congregation. Ezra did not stage an event or orchestrate a spectacle—he simply and carefully proclaimed the Word of God.

This text is a sobering indictment of much of contemporary Christianity. According to the text, a demand for biblical preaching erupted within the hearts of the people. They gathered as a congregation and summoned the preacher. This reflects an intense hunger and thirst for the preaching of the Word of God. Where is this desire evident among today’s evangelicals?

In far too many churches, the Bible is nearly silent. The public reading of Scripture has been dropped from many services and the sermon has been sidelined, reduced to a brief devotional appended to the music. Many preachers accept this as a necessary concession to the age of entertainment. Some hope to put in a brief message of encouragement or exhortation before the conclusion of the service.

The anemia of evangelical worship—all the music and energy aside—is directly attributable to the absence of genuine expository preaching. Such preaching would confront the congregation with nothing less than the living and active Word of God. That confrontation will shape the congregation as the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word, opens eyes, and applies that Word to human hearts. ~ ***Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.***



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Discerning Entertainment

My maternal grandfather, James Robson Featherstone (1915–1995), was born in Wallsend, England, and immigrated to America when he was thirteen years old. A talented singer, he rose to prominence during the big band era in Chicago in the early 1940s. He lived his life among the rich and famous, cut many records, played poker with the Three Stooges, and along the way, lost his professed faith, his family, his fame, and his money. Jimmy Featherstone’s wife, my grandmother, who was also involved in entertainment in the 1940s, brought my mother into modeling when she was young. Coming from such a background, it was natural for my mother to see how I might do in entertainment, culminating in my short time as one of the first Backstreet Boys and my declining Lou Pearlman’s offer to be one of the first members of what became NSYNC.

Although I only caught a glimpse of the entertainment industry, it was enough to help me appreciate all that people must do to be successful in that world and, what’s more, to give me a deep sorrow and distaste for much of it. Through my experience in entertainment, God has heightened my sensitivity as I have attempted to lead my family in how we view and enjoy all types of entertainment: from TV shows to movies, from operas to music, from books to Broadway musicals, from bedtime stories to board games.

Entertainment of all sorts can be a wonderful way to rest and recuperate from the busyness, noise, and struggles of life. Entertainment allows our imaginations to travel the world and explore the universe, to go on adventures with hobbits and knights in shining armor, to go back in time and experience history, and to better understand people and our culture. But we must always guard our eyes and our hearts. For we cannot even begin to understand all the ways that Hollywood has affected us. Entertainment affects our minds, our homes, our culture, and our churches. Consequently, we must be vigilant as we use discernment in how we enjoy entertainment—looking to the light of God’s Word to guide us and inform our consciences.

Entertainment isn’t evil in itself, and we can enjoy it as we remember that in whatever we do, our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever as we live coram Deo, before the face of our omniscient and gracious God. ~ *Reverend Burk Parsons - Editor of Tabletalk Magazine and Co-Pastor Saint Andrews Chapel in Sanford, Florida.*

What is Saving Faith?

Faith is effectual only if one personally trusts in Christ alone for salvation. It is one thing to give an intellectual assent to a proposition but quite another to place personal trust in it. We can say that we believe in justification by faith alone and yet still think that we are going to get to heaven by our achievements, our works, or our striving. It is easy to get the doctrine of justification by faith into our heads, but it is hard to get it into the bloodstream such that we cling to Christ alone for salvation.

Faith is central to Christianity. The New Testament repeatedly calls people to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a definite body of content to be believed, which is part and parcel of our religious activity. At the time of the Reformation, the debate involved the nature of saving faith. What is saving faith? The idea of justification by faith alone suggests to many people a thinly veiled antinomianism that claims people can live any way they like so long as they believe the right things. Yet James wrote in his epistle: “*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ... Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (2:14, 17).



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What is Saving Faith? - Cont'd

Luther said that the sort of faith that justifies is *fides viva*, a “*living faith*,” one that inevitably, necessarily, and immediately yields the fruit of righteousness. Justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. A faith without any yield of righteousness is not true faith.

For the Roman Catholic Church, faith plus works equals justification; for antinomians, faith minus works equals justification; for the Protestant Reformers, faith equals justification plus works. In other words, works are the necessary fruit of true faith. Works are not factored into God’s declaration that we are just in His sight; they are not part of the grounds for God’s decision to declare us righteous.

What are the constituent elements of saving faith? The Protestant Reformers recognized that biblical faith has three essential aspects: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*.

Notitia refers to the content of faith, the things we believe. There are certain things we are required to believe about Christ, namely, that He is the Son of God, that He is our Savior, that He has provided an atonement, and so on.

Assensus is the conviction that the content of our faith is true. One can know about the Christian faith and yet believe that it is not true. We might have a doubt or two mixed with our faith, but there has to be a certain level of intellectual affirmation and conviction if we are to be saved. Before anyone can really trust in Jesus Christ, he has to believe that Christ indeed is the Savior, that He is who He claimed to be. Genuine faith says that the content, the *notitia*, is true.

Fiducia refers to personal trust and reliance. Knowing and believing the content of the Christian faith is not enough, for even demons can do that (**James 2:19**). Faith is effectual only if one personally trusts in Christ alone for salvation. It is one thing to give an intellectual assent to a proposition but quite another to place personal trust in it. We can say that we believe in justification by faith alone and yet still think that we are going to get to heaven by our achievements, our works, or our striving. It is easy to get the doctrine of justification by faith into our heads, but it is hard to get it into the bloodstream such that we cling to Christ alone for salvation.

There is another element to *fiducia* besides trust, and that is *affection*. An unregenerate person will never come to Jesus, because he does not want Jesus. In his mind and heart, he is fundamentally at enmity with the things of God. As long as someone is hostile to Christ, he has no affection for Him. Satan is a case in point. Satan knows the truth, but he hates the truth. He is utterly disinclined to worship God because he has no love for God. We are like that by nature. We are dead in our sin. We walk according to the powers of this world and indulge the lusts of the flesh. Until the Holy Spirit changes us, we have hearts of stone. An unregenerate heart is without affection for Christ; it is both lifeless and loveless. The Holy Spirit changes the disposition of our hearts so that we see the sweetness of Christ and embrace Him. None of us loves Christ perfectly, but we cannot love Him at all unless the Holy Spirit changes the heart of stone and makes it a heart of flesh. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.** - *Adapted from Everyone’s a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology*



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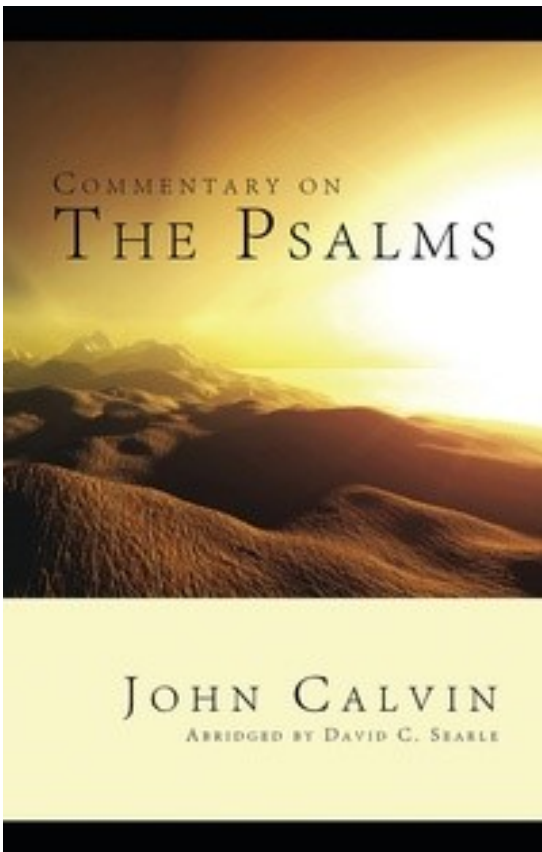


Book Review

Commentary on The Psalms

John Calvin

Abridged by David C. Searle



John Calvin was a practical and pastoral theologian. Like the Apostle Paul he worked tirelessly ‘for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness’ (Titus 1:1). For him knowledge of the truth was for living, and living was for the glory of God. All of Calvin’s preaching, teaching, and writing was directed to this one great end, to serve the church of Jesus Christ so that all ‘may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory’ (2 Timothy 2:10).

This book is an abridgement of Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms, reducing it to about one quarter of its original size. It is the result of a labor of love undertaken by one who has for some years used Calvin on the Psalms in his devotional reading of Scripture, and who has grown to appreciate Calvin’s method of exposition, his faithfulness to the biblical text, and his practical application of the truth to daily living.

But why abridge Calvin? The sad fact is that few teachers and preachers of the gospel today ever use any of Calvin’s commentaries. Some busy pastors and ministers balk at the sheer scale of Calvin’s five-volume commentary on the Psalms, (which forms part of a much larger twenty-two-volume set). Others tend to shy away from Calvin’s writings, mistakenly thinking that such are the preserve of academics and theologians, and not of the whole church. Alas, nothing could be further from the truth!

This abridgement has been made with such people in mind. It is not intended to deprive readers of the full benefit of Calvin’s unabridged text, but to edify those who otherwise might remain strangers to Calvin’s practical and pastoral wisdom. Indeed, in the view of the publisher the editor’s noble aims have been fully met, that in this single volume ‘something of the unsurpassed excellence of Calvin’s instruction will have been preserved and made available to a wider public than would ever have made use of the original massive and magisterial work.’

Here, then, is a treasure chest containing a choice selection of the wonderful riches to be found in Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms.



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Birthdays and Anniversary Corner - July 2017

Birthdays

*Sadie H. (13)
Elijah D. (16)
Teresa H. (21)*

Anniversaries

*David and Jennifer A. (4)
Les and Jessica T. (17)*

Meditating on Psalm 6 Verse 1

"O keep up life and peace within,
If I must feel thy chastening rod!
Yet kill not me, but kill my sin,
And let me know thou art my God.
O give my soul some sweet foretaste
Of that which I shall shortly see!
Let faith and love cry to the last,
“Come, Lord, I trust myself with thee!” - *Richard Baxter*

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.