



Volume 4 Issue 6

West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



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Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Of First Importance - The Priority of the Cross and the Empty Tomb

The Christian faith is not a mere collection of doctrines — a bag of truths. Christianity is a comprehensive truth claim that encompasses every aspect of revealed doctrine, but is centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, as the apostolic preaching makes clear, the gospel is the priority.

The Apostle Paul affirms this priority when he writes to the Christians in Corinth. In the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul sets out his case:

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

Paul points directly to the events of the cross and resurrection of Christ. He is not concerned with just any gospel, but with the only gospel that saves. This is *“the gospel I preached to you,”* Paul reminds the Corinthians. The same Paul who so forcefully warned the Galatians against accepting any false gospel reminds the church at Corinth that the very *“gospel I preached to you”* is the gospel *“by which you are being saved.”* Their stewardship of the gospel is underlined in Paul’s words, *“if you hold fast to the word I preached to you.”*

Paul’s statement of priority is a vital corrective for our confused times. Without hesitation, Paul writes with urgency about the truths that are *“as of first importance.”* All revealed truth is vital, invaluable, life-changing truth to which every disciple of Christ is fully accountable. But certain truths are of highest importance, and that is the language Paul uses without qualification.

And what is of first importance? *“That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,”* and *“that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”* The cross and the empty tomb stand at the center of the Christian faith. Without these, there is no good news — no salvation.

Paul gets right to the heart of the matter in setting out those truths that are *“of first importance.”* Following his example, we can do no less. These twin truths remain *“as of first importance,”* and no sermon is complete without the explicit affirmation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



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Of First Importance - The Priority of the Cross and the Empty Tomb - Cont'd

So it was then, so it is now, and so it ever shall be until Christ claims his church.

As Paul reminded the Corinthians — and now instructs us — the gospel is at the center of our faith, and the cross and the empty tomb are at the center of the gospel. “*So we preach, and so you believed,*” Paul encourages us. [1 Corinthians 15:11]

May the power of the cross and the victory of the empty tomb fill every pulpit, every pew, and every Christian heart — and may the Good News of the gospel be received with joy by sinners in need of a Savior.

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” [1 Corinthians 15:56-58] ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

Five Truths About the Holy Spirit

Jesus said: “*I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you*” (John 16:7). Now, I don’t want to bring cold coals to Newcastle by giving you information with which you are already familiar, so let me just briefly give some background on this verse. You know that the Greek word translated here as “Helper” is *parakletos*. In its technical form, it has a legal dimension; it refers to one who would be an advocate. In its wider context, it speaks of comfort, of protection, of counsel, and of guidance. Jesus also spoke of the Spirit as the Helper in John 14 and introduced Him as “*the Spirit of truth*” (14:17; 16:13).

I think it best for me to simply say a number of things concerning the identity of this Helper with little embellishment.

First, we need to notice that the Holy Spirit is a unique person and not simply a power or an influence. He is spoken of as “*He*,” not as “*it*.” This is a matter of importance because if you listen carefully to people speaking, even within your own congregations you may hear the Holy Spirit referenced in terms of the neuter. You may even catch yourself doing it. If you do, I hope you will bite your tongue immediately. We have to understand that the Spirit of God, the *third* person of the Trinity, is personal. As a person, He may be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), He may be quenched in terms of the exercise of His will (1 Thessalonians 5:19), and He may be resisted (Acts 7:51).

Second, the Holy Spirit is one both with the Father and with the Son. In theological terms, we say that He is both co-equal and co-eternal. When we read the whole Upper Room Discourse, we discover that it was both the Father and the Son who would send the Spirit (John 14:16; 16:7), and the Spirit came and acted, as it were, for both of Them.

So the activity of the Spirit is never given to us in Scripture in isolation from the person and work of Christ or in isolation from the eternal will of the Father.



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Five Truths About the Holy Spirit - Cont'd

Any endeavor to think of the Spirit in terms that are entirely mystical and divorced from Scripture will take us down all kinds of side streets and eventually to dead ends.

Third, the Holy Spirit was the agent of creation. In the account of creation at the very beginning of the Bible, we are told: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”* (Genesis 1:1-2). The Hebrew word translated as *“Spirit”* here is *ruach*, which also can mean *“breath.”* The *ruach elohim*, *“the Breath of the Almighty,”* is the agent in creation. It is not the immateriality of the Spirit that is in view here, but rather His power and energy; the picture is of God’s energy breathing out creation, as it were, speaking the worlds into existence, putting the stars into space. Thus, when we read Isaiah 40:26 and the question is asked, *“Who created these?”* we have the answer in Genesis 1:2—the Spirit is the irresistible power by which God accomplishes His purpose.

Tangentially, one of the questions of Old Testament scholarship concerns the extent to which we are able to discover the distinct personhood of God the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament. In other words, can we understand the nature of His *hypostasis* (essence) in the Old Testament alone? When we read Genesis 1, it is not difficult to see that we have in the second verse, certainly in light of all that has subsequently been revealed, a clear and distinct reference to the third person of the Trinity.

In his book *The Holy Spirit*, Sinclair B. Ferguson notes that if we recognize the divine Spirit in Genesis 1:2, that provides what some refer to as the missing link in Genesis 1:26, where God said, *“Let us make man in our image.”* Ferguson observes that this is a clear antecedent reference to the Spirit of God who is at work in Genesis 1:1-2.

This issue reminds us, incidentally, that it is helpful to read our Bibles backward. As we read from the back to the front, we discover the truth of the classic interpretive principle attributed to Augustine: *“The New [Testament] is in the Old [Testament] concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed.”* In other words, we discover the implications of those teachings and events that come earlier in the Scriptures.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit is the agent not only of creation, but also of God’s new creation in Christ. He is the author of the new birth. We see this in John 3, in the classic encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, where Jesus said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (v. 5). This truth, of course, is worked out in the rest of the Scriptures.

Fifth, the Spirit is the author of the Scriptures. Second Timothy 3:16 tells us, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God. ...”* The Greek word behind this phrase is *theopneustos*, which means *“God-breathed.”* In creation, we have the Spirit breathing His energy, releasing the power of God in the act of creation. We have the same thing in the act of redemption, and we see it again in the divine act of giving to us the record in the Scriptures themselves. The doctrine of inspiration is entirely related to the work of God the Holy Spirit. Peter affirms this view, writing, *“No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:21). The men who wrote the biblical books were not inventing things.



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Five Truths About the Holy Spirit - Cont'd

Neither were they automatons. “They were real people in real historical times with real DNA writing according to their historical settings and their personalities. But the authorship of Scripture was dual. It was, for instance, both Jeremiah and God, because Jeremiah was picked up and carried along. Indeed, in Jeremiah’s case, God said, “*Behold, I have put my words in your mouth*” (1:9). He did so without violating Jeremiah’s distinct personality, and he then wrote the very Word of God. This is why we study the Bible—because this is a book that exists as a result of the out-breathing of the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the identity of the Helper, we could go on ad infinitum, but we must be selective rather than exhaustive. His identity is as “*another Helper*.” The word translated as “*another*” here is *allos*, not *heteros*. Jesus promised a Helper of the same kind rather than of a different kind. The Spirit is the *parakletos*, *the one who comes alongside*. Jesus said He would “*be with you forever ... he dwells with you and will be in you*” (John 14:16-17). In other words, His ministry is both permanent and personal. ~ **Dr. Alistair Begg**

Why Do Christians Love the Law?

Why would anyone love the law of God? Why would we love that which constantly tells us what miserable wretches we are, daily points out all our shortcomings, relentlessly reminds us of all our death-deserving sins, and keeps knocking us down to our knees, leaving us crying out for help?

The truth of the matter is that not just anyone loves the law of God but only those who have been set free by our law-giving, law-keeping, and law-liberating Savior. We love the law of God not because we possess some sort of inherent self-inflicting, self-deprecating sadistic disposition towards our sin but because, in His electing grace, God set His glorious and enduring love upon us, laid His eternal claim upon us, took hold of us and clutched us in His strong hands, and made us His dutiful bondslaves that we might be free to delight in His law (Romans 7:22) and in all the commands of Christ (Matthew 28:20), who by no means abolished the Law but in fact fulfilled it perfectly in our behalf (Matthew 5:17). His death is our life. His fulfillment is our freedom. His duty is our delight.

Our abundant life of freedom in Christ is not simply a freedom to do anything we want to do but to have the uninterrupted, Spirit-sustaining power to do what we know we ought to do as God the Holy Spirit changes our wants and daily transforms our God-given duties into God-glorifying delights. If we are genuinely to cherish the *three* uses of the law, we must first cherish the law itself — not merely as a means to an end but by virtue of its very existence and its authorship. That is to say, we must primarily see the law itself as a gracious gift from our Lord. It’s crucial to understand that we don’t simply love the law because of what it does for us. We love the law of God because in itself it is precious and altogether lovely (Psalm 119:72). Only from this vantage point of loving the law for what it is will we truly love what the law does for us, to us, and in us.

The Holy Spirit sovereignly uses the law in manifold ways — to teach us about our Creator, to give us a glimpse of His righteousness, holiness, and justice, to restrain our sin and the sin of all people, to reflect our heinous sin in order to give us a glimpse of it, to reveal the narrow road to life as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, to drive us to our knees in liberating repentance, to cry out daily for help, and to lift our eyes to Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man, who alone is our righteousness and in whom by faith alone we are perfectly righteous *coram Deo*, before the face of God. ~ **Reverend Burk Parsons**



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Justification by Faith Alone

Paul's doctrine of justification shows clearly (1) that all humans are sinners, helpless to save themselves; (2) that only the perfect work of Jesus saves sinners; (3) that only faith—not works at all—receives the saving effect of Jesus' work; (4) that God in Christ receives all the glory for justification; (5) that this justification brings peace to the heart and mind of the believer.

Celebrations in 2017 of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation will return again and again to the subject of justification by faith alone, one of the Reformation's most critical rediscoveries. That subject is so important that in one sense we cannot study it enough. On the other hand, part of me wonders why we seem to have so much trouble understanding and holding on to a doctrine so vital. Is the doctrine so complicated that we cannot remember it? Is the Bible's teaching so obscure that we cannot penetrate it?

In fact, the Bible is crystal clear and the doctrine is relatively simple. So why did so many in the church miss it before—and after—the Reformation? Why do some Protestant biblical scholars suggest that the Bible is not clear or that Martin Luther and John Calvin were wrong about what Paul teaches? Why do some Protestant theologians compromise and/or confuse the doctrine? Why do some Protestant church leaders see no serious differences between their views on justification and those of the Roman Catholic Church? Of course, books have been written to answer these questions, but on one level the answer is easy: failure to embrace the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith is a spiritual problem—a very serious spiritual failing. It is a failure to grasp fully the Bible's teaching on God, Christ, sin, grace, faith, and peace with God. The spiritual problem for those who reject the biblical doctrine of justification recovered by the Reformation is that they cannot give all glory to God. They must make a contribution, however small, to their own justification. They are not content with Christ alone and His grace alone.

Martin Luther came to understand justification only after a spiritual crisis in his life. John Calvin came to understand it after his conversion. For both of them, study of the Bible showed them the character of the work of Christ and the role of faith in receiving His mercy and the peace of conscience that the Christian can enjoy.

For Lutherans, the doctrine is given eloquent expression in the Augsburg Confession (1530), Article IV: It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21–26 and 4:5.

John Calvin wrote clearly and passionately as a young man of twenty-five about this doctrine in the first chapter of his 1536 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

Christ's righteousness, which alone can bear the sight of God because it alone is perfect, must appear in court on our behalf, and stand surety for us in judgment. Received from God, this righteousness is brought to us and imputed to us, just as if it were ours. (I.32)

Calvin greatly expanded his *Institutes* in 1541 and devoted a whole chapter to justification. There he wrote that *justification is the principal article of the Christian religion, so that each one may take greater pains and care to know it.*



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Justification by Faith Alone - Cont'd

For if we do not know what God's will toward us is, we have no foundation on which to establish our salvation or build us up in piety and fear of God. (1:6)

We see here how Calvin stressed both the objective and the subjective sides of justification. Objectively, we are actually made right with God by the work of Christ, which the sinner receives by faith alone. Subjectively, when we understand justification, we experience peace with God and growing confidence in living for God. Surely, this doctrine is absolutely central to Christian faith and life.

The Reformers found this doctrine of justification in many places in the Bible, but recognized that Paul presented it with particular clarity in his letter to the Romans. While Romans contains profound and occasionally difficult matters, the main line of Paul's message is clear and straightforward. We can see its simplicity by highlighting the main elements of his teaching: *None is righteous, no, not one. (3:10) All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (3:23) By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight. (3:20) The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law ... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. (3:21–22)*

[We are] justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (3:24–25) What then becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. (3:27)

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work, but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. (4:4–5) That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his [Abraham's] offspring. (4:16)

No distrust made him [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. (4:20–21)

Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (5:1–2) God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (5:8)

If many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift of grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. (5:15)

Paul's doctrine of justification shows clearly (1) that all humans are sinners, helpless to save themselves; (2) that only the perfect work of Jesus saves sinners; (3) that only faith—not works at all—receives the saving effect of Jesus' work; (4) that God in Christ receives all the glory for justification; (5) that this justification brings peace to the heart and mind of the believer.

In the midst of our celebrations of the Reformation, let us not lose the crucial and simple center: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. ... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:19–21). This message is the gospel that the whole world needs. It is also the message that every church and every Christian heart needs. Let us celebrate and teach it clearly and faithfully this year and every year. ~ **Dr. W. Robert Godfrey**



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Did You Know?

I normally don't submit articles like this but I felt that it was something new and afresh. There are many trivial things in this world that we are not aware of but this one took special interest to me and I felt that our church (West Suffolk) may find it interesting. ~ *Walt Lawrence*



When baseball greats Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig went on tour in baseball-crazy Japan, in 1934, some fans wondered why a third-string catcher named Moe Berg was included. Although he played with five major-league teams, from 1923 to 1939, he was a very mediocre ball player. But Moe was regarded as the brainiest ballplayer of all time. In fact, Casey Stengel once said: *"That is the strangest man ever to play baseball"*.

When all the baseball stars went to Japan, Moe Berg went with them and many people wondered why he went with "the team". The answer was simple: Moe Berg was a United States spy, working undercover with the Office of Strategic Services (predecessor of today's CIA).

Moe spoke 15 languages - including Japanese. And he had two loves: baseball and spying. Morris "Moe" Berg (March 2, 1902 – May 29, 1972), was an American catcher and coach in Major League Baseball.

In Tokyo, garbed in a kimono, Berg took flowers to the daughter of an American diplomat being treated in St. Luke's Hospital - the tallest building in the Japanese capital. He never delivered the flowers. The ballplayer ascended to the hospital roof and filmed key features: the harbor, military installations, railway yards, etc.

Eight years later, General Jimmy Doolittle studied Berg's films in planning his spectacular raid on Tokyo.

His father disapproved and never once watched his son play. In Barringer High School, Moe learned Latin, Greek and French. Moe read at least 10 newspapers everyday.

He graduated magna cum laude from Princeton - having added Spanish, Italian, German and Sanskrit to his linguistic quiver. During further studies at the Sorbonne, in Paris, and Columbia Law School, he picked up Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indian, Arabic, Portuguese and Hungarian - 15 languages in all, plus some regional dialects. While playing baseball for Princeton University, Moe Berg would describe plays in Latin or Sanskrit.

During World War II, Moe was parachuted into Yugoslavia to assess the value to the war effort of the two groups of partisans there. He reported back that Marshall Tito's forces were widely supported by the people and Winston Churchill ordered all-out support for the Yugoslav underground fighter, rather than Mihajlovic's Serbians.

The parachute jump at age 41 undoubtedly was a challenge. But there was more to come in that same year. Berg penetrated German-held Norway, met with members of the underground, and located a secret heavy-water plant - part of the Nazis' effort to build an atomic bomb. His information guided the Royal Air Force in a bombing raid to destroy that plant.



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Did You Know? - Cont'd

There still remained the question of how far had the Nazis progressed in the race to build the first Atomic bomb. If the Nazis were successful, they would win the war. Berg (under the code name "Remus") was sent to Switzerland to hear leading German physicist Werner Heisenberg, a Nobel Laureate, lecture and determine if the Nazis were close to building an A-bomb.

Moe managed to slip past the SS guards at the auditorium, posing as a Swiss graduate student. The spy carried in his pocket a pistol and a cyanide pill. If the German physicist indicated the Nazis were close to building a weapon, Berg was to shoot him - and then swallow the cyanide pill.

Moe, sitting in the front row, determined that the Germans were nowhere near their goal, so he complimented Heisenberg on his speech and walked him back to his hotel.

Moe Berg's report was distributed to Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and key figures in the team developing the Atomic Bomb. Roosevelt responded: *"Give my regards to the catcher."*

Most of Germany's leading physicists had been Jewish and had fled the Nazis mainly to Britain and the United States. After the war, Moe Berg was awarded the Medal of Freedom - America's highest honor for a civilian in wartime. But Berg refused to accept it because he couldn't tell people about his exploits.

After his death, his sister accepted the Medal. It now hangs in the Baseball Hall of Fame, in Cooperstown.

Moe Berg's baseball card is the only card on display at the CIA Headquarters in Washington, DC.

Before his death in 1972, Berg said, *"Maybe I'm not in the Cooperstown Baseball Hall of Fame like so many of my baseball buddies, but I'm happy I had the chance to play pro ball and am especially proud of my contributions to my country. Perhaps I could not hit like Babe Ruth, but I spoke more languages than he did."*

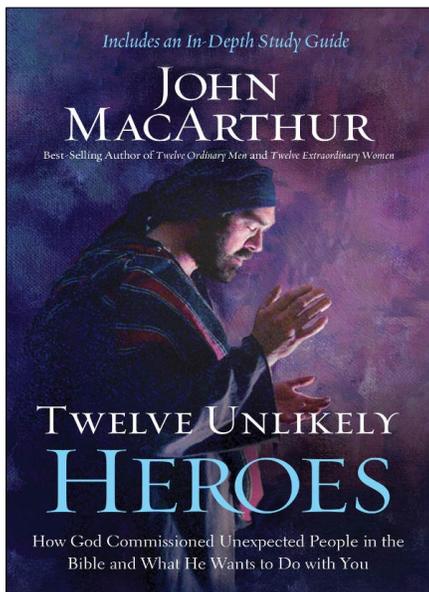
Now you know!!



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Book Reviews *Twelve Unlikely Heroes* *Dr. John MacArthur*



Throughout Scripture the Lord often uses unlikely men and women to accomplish great things in His name—including many who didn't initially seem up to the task.

Not everyone is as talented as psalmist and king, David, or as dynamic as the apostle Paul. But our weaknesses aren't hindrances to God's purpose or plan—they're opportunities for us to depend on Him, and for Him to display His power in and through us.

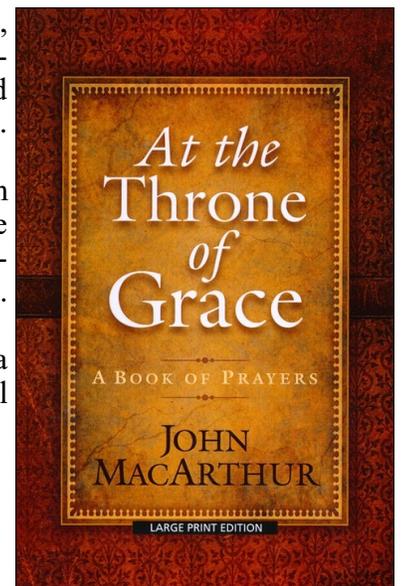
In *Twelve Unlikely Heroes*, Dr. John MacArthur examines men and women who, in spite of their shortcomings and inadequacies, played pivotal roles in God's kingdom work. All of them were unimpressive, forgettable, or ill equipped in their own ways, but the Lord accomplished mighty things in them and through them just the same. Filled with fascinating insight that add color and life to familiar biblical stories and characters, *Twelve Unlikely Heroes* will encourage you in your desire and commitment to be a useful vessel in God's hands.

At the Throne of Grace *Dr. John MacArthur*

Throughout his four decades of pastoral ministry at Grace Community Church, prior to his sermon every Sunday morning, Dr. John MacArthur has read a portion of Scripture and led the congregation in a pastoral prayer. It's a treasured part of the worship service enjoyed by all who attend.

John's family—in particular, his four children—have encouraged him to publish a book of selected prayers he has offered during Lord's Day worship. While he had resisted the idea for many years, he finally gave in. That book is now available and it's called, appropriately, **At the Throne of Grace**.

At the Throne of Grace is not a book of officially sanctioned prayers; it's not a script to follow nor an instruction manual on how to pray. It is a devotional book—something you can open, even to a random page, and benefit from.





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*“Thoughtfully Reformed -
Redemptively Relevant”*

Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Birthday and Anniversary Corner - June 2017

Birthdays

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Anniversaries

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Building the Kingdom of God

Our readiness to perform our task becomes critical when we realize the world also has a mission—to capture and assimilate the church. If the church becomes an echo of the world, the mission of the world is accomplished.

It is our task to build the city of God. It is supremely costly and extraordinarily dangerous. He who will work to build the kingdom of God must be on guard against arrows that are directed at his face—but perhaps even more on guard for the arrows directed at his back.

Nehemiah’s work provoked hostile reactions from some of the pagans. But the real threat was grounded in the fears of God’s people. When a leader like Nehemiah, Paul, or Jesus Himself provokes a hostile reaction from enemies, the people are prone to turn on them as they bear the fallout from such attacks. Remember, it was the people who feared the wrath of Rome who turned their wrath on Jesus.

True leaders of the Christian faith, however, love believers and pagans alike and risk the hostility of both to build the kingdom of God. ~ *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.



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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.