



Volume 4 Issue 10

# *West Suffolk Epistle*

## *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

*“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”*



October 2017

*Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America*

### *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.*

### *Becoming a Witness*

The more the laity is involved in ministry, the more they want to deepen their understanding of the Word of God. The more they deepen their understanding of the Word of God, the more they want to put that understanding to work in ministry.

One thing that disturbs me about contemporary Christian **jargon** is the inexact use of the word witness. Too often people use the terms evangelism and witnessing interchangeably, as if they were synonyms. They are not.

All evangelism is witness, but not all witness is evangelism. Evangelism is a specific type of witnessing. Not everyone is called to be a pastor or teacher. Not everyone is called to administration or specialized ministries of mercy. Not everyone is called to be an evangelist (though we are all called to verbalize our faith). We are all called to be witnesses to Christ, to make His invisible kingdom visible. We witness by doing the ministry of Christ. We witness by being the church, the people of God.

Some of us can plant. Some of us can water. When we plant and water, God will bring an increase. *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



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### *An Act of Pure Evil*

Today, most Americans awoke to news from Las Vegas that is nothing less than horrific. For so many in Las Vegas, Sunday night must have seemed like the night that would never end.

In the face of such overwhelming news, we naturally seek after facts. We want to know what happened, and when. We want to know who did it. By mid-morning the facts were staggering. More than fifty people are dead and hundreds wounded after a lone gunman opened fire on a music festival from a perch in a hotel room 32 floors above. The attack was deadly, diabolical, and premeditated.

The shooting is already described as the worst in American history. The gunman, believed to be Stephen Paddock, killed himself as police prepared to storm his hotel room, from which he had aimed his deadly gunfire. The facts emerged slowly, and are still emerging. Paddock had no notable criminal record. He had worked for a defense contractor, owned two private aircraft, and was known to own guns. He was reported to like Las Vegas for its gambling and entertainment. No one seems to have considered him a threat. His brother, contacted after the massacre, said that the family was beyond shock, as if “crushed by an asteroid.”

In Las Vegas and beyond, hundreds of families are crushed by grief and concern. More than fifty human beings, very much alive just hours ago, are now dead, seemingly murdered by random order.

The facts will continue to come as investigations continue. We need facts in order to steady our minds and grapple with understanding. We must have facts, and yet we can be easily overwhelmed by them. Some “facts” will not be facts at all. National Public Radio helpfully and honestly ended its news coverage of the massacre with these words: “This is a developing story. Some things that get reported by the media will later turn out to be wrong. We will focus on reports from police officials and other authorities. We will update as the situation develops.” I count that as both helpful and honest.

But the facts of who and what and where and how, still unfolding, point to the even more difficult question — why?

Why would anyone kill a fellow human being? Why launch an ambush massacre upon concertgoers listening to country music? Why premeditate a mass killing?

Was he driven by some obsession, fueled by some grievance? Was he sending a signal or political message as an act of terrorism? Is the answer psychiatric or pharmacological? Our minds crave an answer.

Why do we ask why?

We cannot help but ask why because, made in God’s image, we are moral creatures who cannot grasp or understand the world around us without moral categories. We are moral creatures inhabiting a moral universe and our moral sense of meaning is the faculty most perplexed when overwhelmed by horror and grief.

The terror group known as ISIS or the Islamic State claimed that Stephen Paddock was a “lone wolf” attacker who had recently converted to Islam. Law enforcement authorities said there is no evidence of anything related to ISIS or Islam.



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### *An Act of Pure Evil - Cont'd*

Clark County (NV) Sheriff Joe Lombardo told reporters that he was not sure if the massacre was sending a message as a terror attack: “We have to establish what his motivation is first. And there’s motivating factors associated with terrorism other than a distraught person just intending to cause mass casualties.”

So far as we now know, Paddock left no note and communicated no clear message. The gunfire tells some story, but we do not yet know what the story is. We may never know.

That troubles us, and so it should. Knowing the story and determining the motivation would add rationality to our understanding, but we will never really understand.

A massacre by a lone gunman killed 32 people at Virginia Tech in 2007. Another killed 27, mostly children, at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. Yet another killed 49 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando in 2016. We really do not fully understand any of these attacks, nor countless other outbreaks of evil around the world.

One of the main theological insights about evil is that it is so often absurd. It is ultimately inexplicable, unfathomable, and cannot be resolved by human means.

President Trump has demonstrated little interest in academic disputes over moral philosophy so he probably did not intend to wade into deep theoretical waters when he called the massacre “an act of pure evil.” But he called it right, and he expanded on his judgment. “In times such as these I know we are searching for some kind of meaning in the chaos, some kind of light in the darkness.” He went on to say: “The answers do not come easy. But we can take solace knowing that even the darkest space can be brightened by a single light, and even the most terrible despair can be illuminated by a single ray of hope.”

That is exactly how a president should speak, and underlining the “act of pure evil” as evil is exactly how a morally sane person should think. The judgment of evil here, real evil, should be beyond dispute.

Evil is a fact, too. And evil is a theological category. The secular worldview cannot use the word with coherence or sense. The acknowledgement of evil requires the affirmation of a moral judgment and a moral reality above human judgment. If we are just accidental beings in an accidental universe, nothing can really be evil. Evil points to a necessary moral judgment made by a moral authority greater than we are — a transcendent and supernatural moral authority: God.

College professors tell us that moral relativism has produced a generation of Americans who resist calling anything evil, and even deny the existence of moral facts. Justin P. McBrayer, who teaches at Fort Lewis College in Colorado, wrote in The New York Times that “many college-aged students don’t believe in moral facts.” That’s truly frightening, but McBrayer argues that by the time students arrive at college, they have already been told over and over again that there are no moral facts — that nothing is objectively right or wrong.

Only the Christian worldview, based in the Bible, can explain why moral facts exist, and how we can know them. Only the biblical worldview explains why sinful humanity commits such horrible moral wrongs. The Christian worldview also promises that God will bring about a final act of moral judgment that will be the final word on right and wrong — as facts, not merely speculation.



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### *An Act of Pure Evil - Cont'd*

The Gospel of Christ points us to the only way of rescue from the fact of our own evil and guilt.

Our hearts break for the families and communities now grieving, and we pray for them and for those even now fighting for life.

It is both telling and reassuring that secular people, faced with moral horror as we see now in Las Vegas, can still speak of evil as a moral fact — even if they continue to deny moral facts in the classrooms and courtrooms. No one can deny that the horror in Las Vegas came about by an act that was evil, pure evil, and evil as a fact.

I think of the Prophet Isaiah's words: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." [Isaiah 5:20, ESV] ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

### *The Spirit of Worship*

Can true worship be manufactured? What if the musicians play with the right mixture of passion and proficiency; if the lights and videos blend to create the right visual experience; if the words of the songs stimulate and stress the right emotions; and if the staging and the rest of the production engages and entrances the crowd? If church leaders master those details, can they consistently create a powerful worship experience?

In his book *Worship: The Ultimate Priority*, Dr. John MacArthur argues against the emphasis on externals that dominates the church today.

*"Worship is to flow from the inside out. It is not a matter of being in the right place, at the right time, with the right words, the right demeanor, the right clothes, the right formalities, the right music, and the right mood. Worship is not an external activity for which an environment must be created."* <sup>(1)</sup>

Worship is not the product of emotional stimulation and external production value. Above all other concerns, our worship must be grounded in the truth of Scripture; if it's not, it's not truly worship.

However, there is more to worship than its biblical basis. God's truth is the fundamental element, but its presence alone does not constitute biblical worship. Praising and glorifying the Lord is not merely a robotic recitation of His truth; it's a function of your spirit.

True worship is the response of your heart to the truth of God's Word. It encompasses your thoughts and emotions as you reflect on the character and nature of God, the Person and work of Christ, and the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit. It's your spirit's response to the love of God and the countless ways it is displayed throughout His creation.

Throughout the Psalms, David shows us what it means to worship God in spirit. In Psalm 103:1 he exclaims, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name."





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### *The Spirit of Worship - Cont'd*

Psalm 45:1 expresses the same passion, *“My heart overflows with a good theme; I address my verses to the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”* David didn’t have to manipulate or dredge up his emotions to worship the Lord; it was the natural response to the truth God had revealed to him. He was compelled to praise God, not by external forces and factors, but by his love for the Lord and His truth.

And it’s not just in the midst of blessing. We see the same spirit of worship in Psalm 51, as David pours out his heart of repentance.

*“O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”* (Psalm 51:15-17)

Regarding those verses, Dr. John MacArthur writes,

*“David knew that God’s primary concern was not the externals, and in his prayer of repentance he appealed to God on that basis. The proof of the reality of his repentance was his broken and contrite heart, not the burnt offerings he gave. And thus it is with all worship. Its genuineness is evidenced in the heart, where true worship originates. David’s words describe a man whose heart is so filled with contrition, gratitude, and praise that all he needs is to get his mouth open so it will come out.”* <sup>(2)</sup>

Put simply, if your heart’s not in it, it is not true worship.

Believers need to faithfully emphasize the truth of God’s Word in their worship. But doctrinal soundness is not the only vital aspect of praising and glorifying the Lord. Some of the sharpest theological minds in the world are attached to cold, dead hearts that remain unmoved by the truth of Scripture. If God’s Word does not penetrate your heart, no amount of biblical knowledge can result in true worship.

Writing more than three hundred years ago, Puritan author Stephen Charnock made that very point:

*“Without the heart it is no worship; it is a stage play; an acting a part without being that person really which is acted by us: a hypocrite, in the notion of the word, is a stage-player. . . . We may be truly said to worship God, though we [lack] perfection; but we cannot be said to worship him, if we [lack] sincerity.”* <sup>(3)</sup>

Responding to Charnock, Dr. John MacArthur writes,

*“Praise is not true praise unless it comes from the very depths of our hearts. Because we are fallen creatures living in a cursed world, our worship will always be imperfect—until we ourselves are finally perfected through glorification. But our worship must never be insincere. It’s not worship at all, but an insult to God, if what we do is merely a routine performed by rote.”* <sup>(4)</sup>



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### *The Spirit of Worship - Cont'd*

Modern evangelicalism's emphasis on the emotional experience of worship is clearly misplaced. Praising the Lord is much more than just emotional catharsis and sensory stimulation. But equally wrong is the notion held by others in the church that worship is an entirely intellectual experience. Plenty of people have the truth and do nothing with it. Plenty more are only concerned about being right—their doctrinal soundness is simply another tally on their spiritual scoreboard.

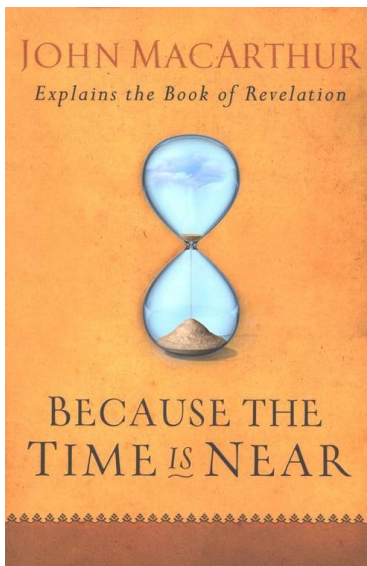
What God's people must understand is that true, biblical worship is a function of both the intellect and the emotions. It's the mind and the spirit working together in harmony to express sincere praise to the Lord. It requires balance that must be maintained, lest the believer slide into unhinged subjectivity or cold, dead intellectualism. We need to guard ourselves from becoming either too emotional or too academic. ~ *Jeremiah Johnson - GTY.ORG/BLOG*

- (1) John MacArthur, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 155.
- (2) John MacArthur, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority*, 155 - 156.
- (3) Stephen Charnock, *Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (New York: Ketcham, n.d.), 225—226.
- (4) John MacArthur, *Worship: The Ultimate Priority*, 156.

## *Book Review*

### *Because the Time is Near*

*Dr. John MacArthur*



"The end of the world is coming." From roadside signs to science fiction films, this slogan underscores our society's nervous fascination with the future. Whether it's a giant asteroid, a worldwide plague, or some other global catastrophe, the end of the world is a terrifying prospect—at least for those who have no idea what it will be like.

For Christians, however, the end of the world should be anything but dreadful. In fact, it should be something we actually look forward to. Why? Because God has told us how the world will end. And He has assured us that the end of this age will mark the beginning of a new, glorious one in which we will serve and worship Him in sinless perfection. Our eternal hope, as believers, is intimately tied to the end of this world.

All of this is laid out in the book of Revelation. Not only is Revelation the inspired Word of God, it is also the only New Testament book that includes a promised spiritual blessing for those who study and apply its message. As such, it is an essential part of every Christian's devotional life. Those who ignore Revelation deprive themselves of a rich treasure of divine truth, and the promised blessings that come from understanding that truth. Join Dr. John MacArthur as he explains the book of Revelation in a way that is both doctrinally precise and intensely practical.



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## *Birthday and Anniversary Corner - October 2017*

### Birthdays

*Ezekiel F. (1)*  
*Charlene S. (3)*

### Anniversaries

*None to Report*

## *Building on a Sure Foundation*

René Descartes intentionally doubted everything he could possibly doubt until he reached the point where he realized there was one thing he couldn't doubt. He could not doubt that he was doubting. To doubt that he was doubting was to prove that he was doubting. No doubt about it.

From that premise of indubitable doubt, Descartes appealed to the formal certainty yielded by the laws of immediate inference. Using impeccable deduction, he concluded that to be doubting required that he be thinking, since thought is a necessary condition for doubting. From there it was a short step to his famous axiom, "I think; therefore I am." At last Descartes arrived at certainty, the assurance of his own personal existence.

The lesson we learn from Descartes is this: When assailed by doubt, it is time to search diligently for first principles that are certain. We build upon the foundation of what is sure. This affects the whole structure of apologetics. It is a matter of order. ~ *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 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.