



Volume 3, Issue 10

# *West Suffolk Epistle*

## *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

*“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”*



October 2016

*Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America*

### *All that Terror Teaches: Have We Learned Anything?*



We are living in dangerous times, but far too many Americans seem to have forgotten this unforgiving fact. How can so many forget the unforgettable?

Terror is a tragic teacher, and the memories of September 11, 2001 haunt us even now. The images of planes crashing, towers collapsing, and bodies falling will be forever seared into our memories. Just to say “9/11” is to invoke a flood of remembrance and the bitter taste of tragedy.

More than three years after 9/11, what have we learned? The immediate aftermath of the terror attacks in New York and Washington was widespread confusion. What had happened? Who was responsible? How awful is the damage? How many have died? Is more to come? The confusion gave way to the even more terrifying clarity. The carnage was just too much to imagine—but too real to deny.

We know so much more now than we knew then. But have we really learned anything? We must hope so, but lessons learned in a moment of urgency have a way of fading into memory. What lessons must remain?

**First**, the terror has taught us to accept reality. This is a dangerous world. Towers we thought to be sound were attacked in a nation we thought to be safe, hit by airplanes we thought were no threat. Reality has a way of interrupting our dreams, and Americans have dreamed ourselves safe from the dangers that threaten the rest of the world. Those dreams came to an end on September 11. Americans now routinely accept levels of scrutiny and screening that would have baffled previous generations. We line up for airport security checks, taking off shoes and coats, while we send our earthly goods through x-ray machines and walk through metal detectors—all the while talking with friends and family as if this were normal, for now it is. How can people who board airplanes fail to remember that we live in a dangerous world?

**Second**, the terror has taught us to distinguish between good and evil. Our age has grown ever more reluctant to make moral judgments. Moral cowardice has denied the inherent evil of immoral acts. Moral relativism has denied any objective judgment of right and wrong. A naive non-judgmentalism often masquerades as moral humility. A refusal to make moral judgments is not humility—it is insanity.

The American university culture has embraced this false humility as a basic worldview. Speaking of morally disarmed college students, journalist David Brooks explained: “On campus they found themselves wrapped in a haze of relativism. There were words and jargon and ideas everywhere, but nothing solid that would allow a person to climb from one idea to the next. These students were trying to form judgments, yet were blocked by the accumulated habits of nonjudgmentalism.”



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### *All that Terror Teaches: Have We Learned Anything?-Continued*

These “accumulated habits of nonjudgmentalism” are very much in evidence on America’s campuses today—and in the academic world of publishing and public lectures. Why would we expect moral sanity from a campus culture that celebrates Michael Moore, Alec Baldwin, and Noam Chomsky as wise men?

These accumulated habits were of no use on September 11. The attacks on New York and Washington, carefully planned to maximize civilian casualties and terror, were unadulterated evil. These were not acts of cultural rebellion or national liberation—they were acts of murderous terror at the hands of men rightly named as murderous terrorists. We came face to face with the undeniable reality of evil. Moral relativism was stripped of its disguise on September 11. It is evil to speak of those attacks as anything less than evil.

**Third**, we learned once again that God is ultimately in control, or else we are lost in a cosmos of chaos. Tragedy breeds theological tremors. Is God really in control? Could a good God allow such pain and loss? Can we really know anything about God at all?

Christians were called upon to answer with the calm confidence of biblical truth and genuine faith. God has revealed Himself in the Bible, and He has shown Himself to be both omnipotent and loving. Both truths are non-negotiable, and each complements the other. We have no choice but to affirm both truths as two sides of one great truth, and to affirm that God’s sovereignty and His moral perfection are established in His own revelation and in His own terms.

**Fourth**, we learned that the Gospel has enemies. We should have known this all along, for the Apostle Paul described the Gospel of Christ’s cross as a stumbling block and scandal. The cross has its enemies. The attacks of 9/11 were made in the name of Islam—not in the name of secularism. Muslim and non-Muslim alike argued whether Islam is at war with America, or if the terrorists were acting in violation of the Koran. Whatever the merits of those arguments, the more important truth is that Islam is at war with the cross of Christ.

Those who love the gospel learned again that Islam rejects Christ as the incarnate Son of God and the cross as the atonement for our salvation. There can be no reconciliation between the claims of Christianity and the claims of Islam. The enemies of the cross know this full well.

Secularism raised its head in the aftermath of 9/11 to warn that anyone who takes truth claims seriously is a potential terrorist—the Christian as well as the Muslim. Claims that Jesus is the only Savior and that salvation is found in His name alone were dismissed as “theological terrorism” and religious extremism. For this the early Christian martyrs gave their lives.

**Fifth**, we learned that spirituality is no substitute for Christian faith. Churches were filled to capacity in the weeks following September 11. Some observers predicted a period of national revival and openness to the Gospel. That did not happen. Within just a few months church attendance had fallen to pre-9/11 levels. The national trauma produced flutterings of “spirituality” but little evidence of renewed Christian conviction.

Spirituality is what is left when authentic Christianity is evacuated from the public square. It is the refuge of the faithless seeking the trappings of faith without the demands of revealed truth. Spirituality affirms us in our self-centeredness and soothingly tells us that all is well. Authentic faith in Christ calls us out of ourselves, points us to the cross, and summons us to follow Christ.



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### *All that Terror Teaches: Have We Learned Anything?-Continued*

The lessons terror taught us are still fresh for those with the will to remember. The gaping hole in Manhattan's skyline and the scarred landscape of Washington point to the unspeakably greater loss measured in human life and human misery. The distance of years has not healed the wounds, but it has sharpened the memory. There are lessons we have learned. In the midst of a very different war, the indomitable G. K. Chesterton understood the same lessons. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*

From all that terror teaches,  
From lies of tongue and pen,  
From all the easy speeches  
That comfort cruel men,  
From sale and profanation  
Of honour and the sword,  
From sleep and from damnation,  
Deliver us, good Lord!

*G. K. Chesterton*

"A Hymn"

### *Does Prayer Change God's Mind?*

Does prayer make any difference? Does it really change anything? Someone once asked me that question, only in a slightly different manner: "Does prayer change God's mind?" My answer brought storms of protest. I said simply, "No." Now, if the person had asked me, "Does prayer change things?" I would have answered, "Of course!"

The Bible says there are certain things God has decreed from all eternity. Those things will inevitably come to pass. If you were to pray individually or if you and I were to join forces in prayer or if all the Christians of the world were to pray collectively, it "would not change what God, in His hidden counsel, has determined to do. If we decided to pray for Jesus not to return, He still would return. You might ask, though, "Doesn't the Bible say that if two or three agree on anything, they'll get it?" Yes, it does, but that passage is talking about church discipline, not prayer requests.





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### *Does Prayer Change God's Mind?- Continued*

So we must take all the biblical teaching on prayer into account and not isolate one passage from the rest. We must approach the matter in light of the whole of Scripture, resisting an atomistic reading. Again, you might ask, “Doesn’t the Bible say from time to time that God repents?” Yes, the Old Testament certainly says so. The book of Jonah tells us that God “repented of” the judgment He had planned for the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:10, KJV). In using the concept of repentance here, the Bible is describing God, who is Spirit, in what theologians call “anthropomorphic” language. Obviously the Bible does not mean that God repented in the way we would repent; otherwise, we could rightly assume that God had sinned and therefore would need a savior Himself. What it clearly means is that God removed the threat of judgment from the people. The Hebrew word *nacham*, translated “repent” in the King James Version, means “comforted” or “eased” in this case. God was comforted and felt at ease that the people “had turned from their sin, and therefore He revoked the sentence of judgment He had imposed.

When God hangs His sword of judgment over people’s heads, and they repent and He then withholds His judgment, has He really changed His mind? The mind of God does not change for God does not change. Things change, and they change according to His sovereign will, which He exercises through secondary means and secondary activities. The prayer of His people is one of the means He uses to bring things to pass in this world. So if you ask me whether prayer changes things, I answer with an unhesitating “Yes!”

It is impossible to know how much of human history reflects God’s immediate intervention and how much reveals God working through human agents. Calvin’s favorite example of this was the book of Job. The Sabeans and the Chaldeans had taken Job’s donkeys and camels. Why? Because Satan had stirred their hearts to do so. But why? Because Satan had received permission from God to test Job’s faithfulness in any way he so desired, short of taking Job’s life. Why had God agreed to such a thing? For *three* reasons: (1) to silence the slander of Satan; (2) to vindicate Himself; and (3) to vindicate Job from the slander of Satan. All of these reasons are perfectly righteous justifications for God’s actions.

By contrast, Satan’s purpose in stirring up these two groups was to cause Job to blaspheme God—an altogether wicked motive. But we notice that Satan did not do something supernatural to accomplish his ends. He chose human agents—the Sabeans and Chaldeans, who were evil by nature—to steal Job’s animals. The Sabeans and Chaldeans were known for their thievery and murderous way of life. Their will was involved, but there was no coercion; God’s purpose was accomplished through their wicked actions.

The Sabeans and Chaldeans were free to choose, but for them, as for us, freedom always means freedom within limits. We must not, however, confuse human freedom and human autonomy. There will always be a conflict between divine sovereignty and human autonomy. There is never a conflict between divine sovereignty and human freedom. The Bible says that man is free, but he is not an autonomous law unto himself.

Suppose the Sabeans and Chaldeans had prayed, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” I’m absolutely certain that Job’s animals still would have been stolen, but not necessarily by the Sabeans and Chaldeans. God might have chosen to” answer their prayer, but He would have used some other agent to steal Job’s animals. There is freedom within limits, and within those limits, our prayers can change things. The Scriptures tell us that Elijah, through prayer, kept the rain from falling. He was not dissuaded from praying by his understanding of divine sovereignty.



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### *Does Prayer Change God's Mind? - Continued*

No human being has ever had a more profound understanding of divine sovereignty than Jesus. No man ever prayed more fiercely or more effectively. Even in Gethsemane, He requested an option, a different way. When the request was denied, He bowed to the Father's will. The very reason we pray is because of God's sovereignty, because we believe that God has it within His power to order things according to His purpose. That is what sovereignty is all about—ordering things according to God's purpose. So then, does prayer change God's mind? No. Does prayer change things? Yes, of course. The promise of the Scriptures is that "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16). The problem is that we are not all that righteous. What prayer most often changes is the wickedness and the hardness of our own hearts. That alone would be reason enough to pray, even if none of the other reasons were valid or true.

In a sermon titled "The Most High, a Prayer-Hearing God," Jonathan Edwards gave two reasons why God requires prayer:

*With respect to God, prayer is but a sensible acknowledgement of our dependence on him to his glory. As he hath made all things for his own glory, so he will be glorified and acknowledged by his creatures; and it is fit that he should require this of those who would be subjects of his mercy . . . [it] is a suitable acknowledgement of our dependence on the power and mercy of God for that which we need, and but a suitable honor paid to the great Author and Fountain of all good.*

*With respect to ourselves, God requires prayer of us . . . Fervent prayer many ways tends to prepare the heart. Hereby is excited a sense of our need . . . whereby the mind is more prepared to prize [his mercy] . . . Our prayer to God may excite in us a suitable sense and consideration of our dependence on God for the mercy we ask, and a suitable exercise of faith in God's sufficiency, so that we may be prepared to glorify his name when the mercy is received. (The Works of Jonathan Edwards [Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974], 2:116)*

All that God does is for His glory first and for our benefit second. We pray because God commands us to pray, because it glorifies Him, and because it benefits us. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**

### *The Unchanging Gospel*



I am a Christian, and I am a Protestant. I am a Christian because I trust Jesus Christ alone, believing that salvation is accomplished by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. I am a devout Protestant because I continue to protest against anyone who even suggests that salvation is accomplished in any other way.

When I entered Rome for the first time not too long ago, I was naturally looking forward to visiting St. Peter's Basilica within the towering walls of Vatican City. As I stood under the world's tallest dome, I was simply in awe of its magnificent grandeur. However, as I considered how the entire structure was funded, I was instantly overwhelmed with emotion.



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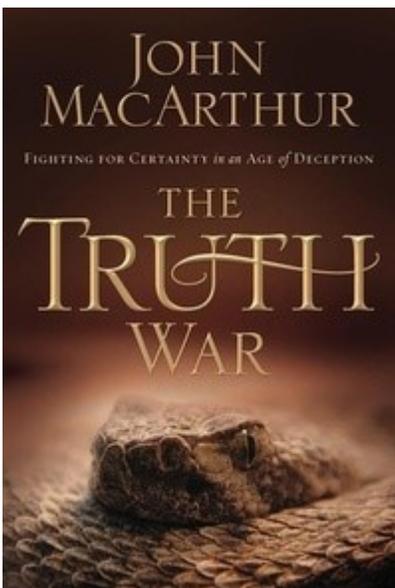
### *The Unchanging Gospel - Continued*

Deep sorrow and righteous vexation filled my heart as I began to recall the system of indulgences contrived by particular popes and cardinals of sixteenth-century Rome, who endeavored to build the basilica on the backs of common people throughout the Holy Roman Empire. For the most part, the construction of the basilica was funded by the preaching of a twisted gospel that promised eternal life in Christ with a few qualifications, such as the one John Tetzel allegedly coined: “When a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs.”

As I write, dozens of men in hard hats are breaking their backs in order to build a new sanctuary and fellowship hall for Saint Andrew’s Chapel where Dr. Sproul and I serve. When complete, the sanctuary will reflect the style of the great cathedrals throughout Europe. However, as we seek to build this new sanctuary, even amid difficult economic times, we do not twist the gospel of Christ in order to fund this immense undertaking. In fact, it is precisely on account of the historic, unchangeable gospel that we are building a sanctuary wherein, Lord willing, the never-changing gospel will shine forth in this ever-changing world for generations to come. The Lord God Almighty is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Therefore, His Word cannot change, the four accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ cannot change, and the simple, unqualified gospel of God cannot change. As Christians, we live, move, and have our being before the face of God, and as Protestants, we must continue to stand for the gospel, even when we find our own proud hearts wanting to add our own works to the finished work of Jesus Christ. ~ *Burk Parsons, Editor of Tabletalk magazine and serves as co-pastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla.*

## *Book Review*

### *The Truth War* *Dr. John MacArthur*



Right now, truth is under attack, and much is at stake. Perhaps no one in America is more passionate than Dr. John MacArthur about exposing those who are mounting this attack—especially those bringing the assault right into the church.

There is no middle ground—no safe zone for the uncommitted in this war. The battle for truth is raging, and this book reveals:

- The pitfalls of postmodern thinking
- Why the Emerging Church Movement is inherently flawed
- Past skirmishes in the Truth War and their effect on the Church
- The importance of truth and certainty in a postmodern society
- How to identify and address the errors and false teaching smuggled into churches



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### *Why Study Church History?*

If church history does not get your blood pumping, you had better check your spiritual pulse. The sixteenth century alone provides a treasure of soul-stirring narratives. Think of Martin Luther's bold and daring stand for the gospel against the destructive errors of Rome. Consider the faithful witness of the English martyrs who died singing psalms as they were consumed by flames. Or, how about the courageous life of John Knox, who while enslaved in the bowels of a French galley ship cried out, "Give me Scotland, or I die"?

The study of church history, however, is meant to provide more than just inspiration. Serious reflection on the past protects us from error, reminds us of God's faithfulness, and motivates us to persevere.

#### *Protection From Error*

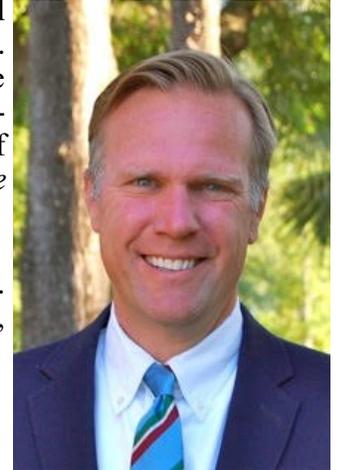
Irish philosopher Edmund Burke wisely remarked that "those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." Indeed, without a basic knowledge of church history, individual Christians and churches are prone to repeat the same doctrinal errors and foolish mistakes of former days.

Familiarity with the history and theology of the early ecumenical councils of Nicea (325) and Chalcedon (451), for example, helps to protect individuals and churches from unwittingly believing ancient Trinitarian and christological heresies. Furthermore, careful reflection upon revivalistic movements such as the Second Great Awakening warns us not to abandon biblical ministry for manipulative methods and quick numerical growth. The study of church history, therefore, preserves both orthodoxy (right doctrine) and orthopraxy (right practice).

In addition to safeguarding us from doctrinal error, the study of church history helps protect us from repeating the foolish mistakes of others. One example comes from the life and ministry of John Knox.

The fiery Scot wrote a polemical tract in 1558 titled "*The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstruous Regiment of Women.*" The work unapologetically condemns the rule of female monarchs. Against the better judgment of John Calvin and others, who were strategically working toward reform in Britain and on the Continent, Knox submitted his "First Blast" for publication. Though aimed chiefly at other lady monarchs, the tract inadvertently fell into the hands of the newly crowned Queen Elizabeth I. Unsurprisingly, the queen was highly displeased. Thereafter, Knox and everyone associated with the Genevan Reformation lost favor with Elizabeth, all because of an unnecessary tract on female sovereigns.

The Scottish Reformer's unwise decision to publish "First Blast" teaches an important lesson. It instructs ministers and others to be more careful about the content and timing of their writings, especially in a day when self-publishing and instantaneous (and often unedited) posting on social media are so prevalent. Not every deep conviction or strong opinion is worthy of publication. Knowledge of events from the past, therefore, constructively informs our decisions in the present. It protects us from heresy and imprudence.





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### *Why Study Church History? - Continued*

#### *Reminder Of God's Faithfulness*

To study church history is to study God's unbending faithfulness. Christians must regularly reflect upon this truth in a world where there is increasing persecution of the church and the future seems uncertain. Like the psalmist, we must "recount all of [God's] wonderful deeds" to remind ourselves that He will never leave us or forsake us (Psalm 9:1; Hebrews 13:5).

Scripture provides a wealth of history to remind us of God's steadfast faithfulness. From the days of creation to the ministry of Christ to the establishment of the church, the Bible tells the story of the sovereign God who is faithful to His people. But it's not only in redemptive history that God's faithfulness is on display; it is also seen in the annals of church history.

Consider how God's faithfulness is manifest in the preservation and expansion of the early church during the grisly persecutions of Roman Emperor Diocletian. Think of God's fidelity in the recovery and rise of gospel proclamation during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation or the astonishing multiplication of believers in China since 1850. And there are thousands of individual stories within the larger ones that remind us that our heavenly Father can and should be trusted no matter what our circumstances.

#### *Motivation To Persevere*

Every believer knows that he desperately needs divine grace, motivation, and encouragement to carry on. Of course, Christ and His ordained means of Word, sacrament, and prayer are the essential means and motivation for perseverance (Hebrews 12:2). Even so, we can find motivation to persevere in the study of church history.

Considering that "great cloud of witnesses," the godly lives of believers from the past, can motivate and inspire us to "lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely . . . [and to] run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Are you feeling spiritually weary? Are you ready to give up? Throw yourself into the arms of Christ and also into the pages of church history. Spend time reflecting upon the faithful lives and godly voices of the past, on those whose faith motivates you to keep running. Take up and read a biography of Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, or Elisabeth Elliott. Explore an overview of the Reformation or a survey of the modern missionary movement. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once asserted that every "Christian should learn from history . . . it is his duty to do so." He was right. Therefore, dear believer, let us study, learn, and enjoy the history of the church. ~ *Dr. Jon D. Payne - Senior pastor of Christ Church Presbyterian (PCA) in Charleston, S.C.*



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### *Birthday and Anniversary Corner - October 2016*

#### Birthdays

*Ezekiel Fox - October 1*  
*Charlene Scofield - October 2*

#### Anniversaries

*None to Report*

## *Seeking the Lost*

Martin Luther, as a herald of the Reformation, exclaimed that the church must be profane. It must move out of the temple and into the world. Luther looked to the Latin roots of the word profane, which comes from profanus (“outside the temple”). If Christ is not relevant outside the church, He is insignificant inside the church. If our faith is bound to the inner chambers of the Christian community, it is at best a disobedient faith and at worst, no faith at all.

It was the Pharisees who developed the doctrine of salvation by separation. They were practicing segregationists, believing that holiness was achieved by avoiding contact with unclean sinners. No wonder they were scandalized by the behavior of Jesus, who dealt with Samaritans, ate dinner with tax collectors, placed His hand upon lepers, and ministered to harlots. Our Lord was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton, not because He was overweight or given to intemperance, but because He frequented places where these things were commonplace.

If guilt by association were a legitimate offense, Jesus would have lost His sinlessness early in His ministry. But He came to seek and to save the lost. He found them gathered in His Father’s world. ~ **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.