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West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



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Putting Faith into Action

The author of Hebrews defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith fills the vacuum of hope. Hope, when coupled with faith, has substance, and substance is something rather than nothing. Faith also provides evidence for that which is not visible. Faith is not blind. Indeed far from being blind, it is both far-sighted and sharp-sighted. Its evidence rests not on speculation but on confidence in a God who sees what we cannot see. It rests on trust in the reliability of every promise that is uttered by God.

It is one thing to believe in God. It is quite another to believe God. Abraham believed God when He said He would show him a better country. He believed God again later when God dramatized His covenant promise in Genesis 15, and by this faith Abraham was counted righteous. He was justified by his faith.

That Abraham’s faith was genuine is seen in that he obeyed God by faith. True faith is always obedient faith. Abraham obeyed the call of God on his life—and he demonstrated this obedience when he “went out.” His faith issued in action. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*

Is the Enemy of My Enemy My Friend?

We are not living in a season of peace. Thinking Christians must surely be aware that a great moral and spiritual conflict is taking shape all around us, with multiple fronts of battle and issues of great importance at stake. The prophet Jeremiah repeatedly warned of those who would falsely declare peace when there is no peace. The Bible defines the Christian life in terms of spiritual battle, and believers in this generation face the fact that the very existence of truth is at stake in our current struggle.

The condition of warfare brings a unique set of moral challenges to the table, and the great moral and cultural battles of our times are no different. Even ancient thinkers knew this, and many of their maxims of warfare are still commonly cited. Among the most popular of these is a maxim that was known by many of the ancients—“the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

That maxim has survived as a modern principle of foreign policy. It explains why states that have been at war against one another can, in a very short period of time, become allies against a common enemy. In World War II, the Soviet Union began as an ally of Nazi Germany. Yet, it ended the war as a key ally of the United States and Britain. How? It joined the effort against Hitler and became the instant “friend” of the Americans and the British. And yet, as that great war came to an end, the Soviets and their former allies entered a new phase of open hostility known as the Cold War.

Does this useful maxim of foreign policy serve Christians well as we think about our current struggles? That is not an uncomplicated question. On the one hand, some sense of unity against a common opponent is inevitable, even indispensable. On the other hand, the idea that a common enemy produces a true unity is, as even history reveals, a false premise.



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



Is the Enemy of My Enemy My Friend? - Cont'd

We must not underestimate what we are up against. We face titanic struggles on behalf of human life and human dignity against the culture of death and the great evils of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. We are in a great fight for the integrity of marriage as the union of a man and a woman. We face a cultural alliance determined to advance a sexual revolution that will unleash unmitigated chaos and bring great injury to individuals, families, and the society at large. We are fighting to defend gender as part of the goodness of God's creation and to defend the very existence of an objective moral order.

Beyond all these challenges, we are engaged in a great battle to defend the existence of truth itself, to defend the reality and authority of God's revelation in Scripture, and to defend all that the Bible teaches. A pervasive anti-supernaturalism seeks to deny any claim of God's existence or our ability to know him. Naturalistic worldviews dominate in the academy, and the New Atheism sells books by the millions. Theological liberalism does its best to make peace with the enemies of the church, but faithful Christians have no way to escape the battles to which this generation of believers are called.

So, are the other enemies of our enemies our friends? Mormons, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Jews, and a host of others share many of our enemies in this respect. But, to what extent is there unity among us?

At this point, very careful and honest thinking is required of us. At one level, we can join with anyone, regardless of worldview, to save people from a burning house. We would gladly help an atheist save a neighbor from danger or even beautify the neighborhood. Those actions do not require a shared theological worldview.

At a second level, we certainly see all those who defend human life and human dignity, marriage and gender, and the integrity of the family as key allies in the current cultural struggle. We listen to each other, draw arguments from each other, and are thankful for each other's support of our common concerns. We even recognize that there are elements common to our worldviews that explain our common convictions on these issues. And yet, our worldviews are really quite different.

With the Roman Catholic Church, our common convictions are many, including moral convictions about marriage, human life, and the family. Beyond that, we together affirm the truths of the divine Trinity, orthodox Christology, and other doctrines as well. But we disagree over what is supremely important—the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that supreme difference leads to other vital disagreements as well—over the nature and authority of the Bible, the nature of the ministry, the meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and an entire range of issues central to the Christian faith.

Christians defined by the faith of the Reformers must never forget that nothing less than faithfulness to the gospel of Christ forced the Reformers to break from the Roman Catholic Church. Equal clarity and courage are required of us now.

In a time of cultural conflict, the enemy of our enemy may well be our friend. But, with eternity in view and the gospel at stake, the enemy of our enemy must not be confused as a friend to the gospel of Jesus Christ. ~
Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



Preach the Word

Every season of reformation and every hour of spiritual awakening has been ushered in by a recovery of biblical preaching. This cause and effect is timeless and inseparable. J.H. Merle D'Aubigné, a noted Reformation historian, writes, "The only true reformation is that which emanates from the Word of God." That is to say, as the pulpit goes, so goes the church.

Such was the case in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others were raised up by God to lead His church in this era. At the forefront, it was their recovery of expository preaching that helped launch this religious movement that turned Europe and, eventually, Western civilization upside down. With sola Scriptura as their battle cry, a new generation of biblical preachers restored the pulpit to its former glory and revived Apostolic Christianity.

The same was true in the golden era of the Puritans in the seventeenth century. A recovery of biblical preaching spread like wild fire through the dry religion of Scotland and England. A resurgence of authentic Christianity came as an army of biblical expositors—John Owen, Jeremiah Burroughs, Samuel Rutherford, and others—marched upon the kingdoms of England and Scotland with an open Bible and uplifted voice. In its wake, the monarchy was shaken and history was altered.

The eighteenth century witnessed exactly the same. The Bible-saturated preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and the Tennents thundered through the early Colonies. The Atlantic seaboard was electrified with the proclamation of the gospel, and New England was taken by storm. The Word was preached, souls were saved, and the kingdom expanded.

The fact is, the restoration of biblical preaching has always been the leading factor in any revival of genuine Christianity. Philip Schaff writes, "Every true progress in church history is conditioned by a new and deeper study of the Scriptures." That is to say, every great revival in the church has been ushered in by a return to expository preaching.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, preacher at Westminster Chapel, London, stated, "The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is the greatest need of the world also." If his diagnosis is correct, and this writer believes it is, then a return to true preaching—biblical preaching, expository preaching—is the greatest need in this critical hour. If a reformation is to come to the church, it must begin in the pulpit.

In his day, the prophet Amos warned of an approaching famine, a deadly drought that would cover the land. But this famine was not an absence of mere food or water, for this scarcity would be far more fatal. It would be a famine for hearing God's Word (Amos 8:11). Surely, the church today finds itself in similar days of shortage. Tragically, exposition is being replaced with entertainment, doctrine with drama, theology with theatrics, and preaching with performances. What is so desperately needed today is for pastors to return to their highest calling—the divine summons to "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:1–2).

What is expository preaching? The Genevan Reformer John Calvin explained, "Preaching is the public exposition of Scripture by the man sent from God, in which God Himself is present in judgment and in grace." In other words, God is unusually present, by His Spirit, in the preaching of His Word. Such preaching starts in a biblical text, stays in it, and shows its God-intended meaning in a life-changing fashion.



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



Preach the Word - Cont'd

This was the final charge of Paul to young Timothy: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). Such preaching necessitates declaring the full counsel of God in Scripture. The entire written Word must be expounded. No truth should be left untaught, no sin unexposed, no grace unoffered, no promise undelivered.

A heaven-sent revival will only come when Scripture is enthroned once again in the pulpit. There must be the clarion declaration of the Bible, the kind of preaching that gives a clear explanation of a biblical text with compelling application, exhortation, and appeal.

Every preacher must confine himself to the truths of Scripture. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. The man of God has nothing to say apart from the Bible. He must not parade his personal opinions in the pulpit. Nor may he expound worldly philosophies. The preacher is limited to one task—to preach the Word.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “I would rather speak five words out of this book than 50,000 words of the philosophers. If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God’s Word into our sermons.” This remains the crying need of the hour.

May a new generation of strong men step forward and speak up, and may they do so loud and clear. As the pulpit goes, so goes the church. ~ *Dr. Steven J. Lawson*

What is the Gospel?

The nineteenth-century Princeton theologian Charles Hodge said, “The gospel is so simple that small children can understand it, and it is so profound that studies by the wisest theologians will never exhaust its riches.” The gospel is absolutely fundamental to everything we believe, and it is at the very core of who we are as Christians. However, many professing Christians struggle to answer the simple question: What is the gospel? When I teach, I am astounded by how many of my students are unable to provide a biblically accurate explanation of what the gospel is, and, what’s more, what the gospel is not. If we don’t know what the gospel is, we are of all people the most to be pitied. For, if we can’t explain the gospel, then we can’t proclaim the gospel in evangelism so that sinners might be saved, and we in fact may not be saved ourselves. In our day, there are countless counterfeit gospels, both inside and outside the church. Much of what is on Christian television and on the shelves of Christian bookstores completely obscures the gospel, thereby making it another gospel, which is no gospel at all. Since Satan cannot destroy the gospel, as J.C. Ryle wrote, “he has too often neutralized its usefulness by addition, subtraction, or substitution.” It is vital we understand that just because a preacher talks about Jesus, the cross, and heaven, that does not mean he is preaching the gospel. And just because there is a church building on every corner does not mean the gospel is preached on every corner.

Fundamentally, the gospel is news. It’s good news—the good news about what our triune God has graciously accomplished for His people: The Father’s sending the Son, Jesus Christ, God incarnate, to live perfectly, fulfill the law, and die sacrificially, atoning for our sins, satisfying God’s wrath against us that we might not face an eternal hell, and raising Him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the victorious announcement that God saves sinners.



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



What is the Gospel? - Cont'd

And even though the call of Jesus to “take up your cross and follow me,” “repent and believe,” “deny yourself,” and “keep my commandments” are necessary commands that directly follow the proclamation of the gospel, they are not in themselves the good news of what Jesus has accomplished. The gospel is not a summons to work harder to reach God—it’s the grand message of how God worked all things together for good to reach us. The gospel is good news, not good advice, just as J. Gresham Machen wrote: “What I need first of all is not exhortation, but a gospel, not directions for saving myself but knowledge of how God has saved me. Have you any good news? That is the question that I ask of you.” ~ *Dr. Burk Parsons - Co-Pastor - Saint Andrews Chapel in Sanford, Florida - Ligonier teaching fellow - Editor of Tabletalk Magazine*

A Catechism on the Heart

Sometimes people ask authors, “Which of your books is your favorite?” The first time the question is asked, the response is likely to be “I am not sure; I have never really thought about it.” But forced to think about it, my own standard response has become, “I am not sure what my favorite book is; but my favorite title is *A Heart for God*.” I am rarely asked, “Why?” but (in case you ask) the title simply expresses what I want to be: a Christian with a heart for God.

Perhaps that is in part a reflection of the fact that we sit on the shoulders of the giants of the past. Think of John Calvin’s seal and motto: a heart held out in the palm of a hand and the words “I offer my heart to you, Lord, readily and sincerely.” Or consider Charles Wesley’s hymn:

O for a heart to praise my God! A heart from sin set free.

Some hymnbooks don’t include Wesley’s hymn, presumably in part because it is read as an expression of his doctrine of perfect love and entire sanctification. (He thought it possible to have his longing for sinless perfection fulfilled in this world.) But the sentiment itself is surely biblical.

But behind the giants of church history stands the testimony of Scripture. The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart (Deuteronomy 6:5). That is why, in replacing Saul as king, God “sought out a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), for “the Lord looks on the heart” (16:7). It is a truism to say that, in terms of our response to the gospel, the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. But truism or not, it is true.

What this looks like, how it is developed, in what ways it can be threatened, and how it expresses itself are important questions that we cannot fully answer here. But, perhaps it will help us if we map out some preliminary matters in the form of a catechism on the heart:

Question # 1: What is the heart?

A. The heart is the central core and drive of my life intellectually (it involves my mind), affectionately (it shapes my soul), and totally (it provides the energy for my living).



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



A Catechism on the Heart - Cont'd

Question # 2: Is my heart healthy?

A. No. By nature, I have a diseased heart. From birth, my heart is deformed and antagonistic to God. The intentions of its thoughts are evil continually.

Question # 3: Can my diseased heart be healed?

A. Yes. God, in His grace, can give me a new heart to love Him and to desire to serve Him.

Question # 4: How does God do this?

A. God does this through the work of the Lord Jesus for me and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in me. He illumines my mind through the truth of the gospel, frees my enslaved will from its bondage to sin, cleanses my affections by His grace, and motivates me inwardly to live for Him by rewriting His law into my heart so that I begin to love what He loves. The Bible calls this being “born from above.”

Question # 5: Does this mean I will never sin again?

A. No. I will continue to struggle with sin until I am glorified. God has given me a new heart, but for the moment He wants me to keep living in a fallen world. So day by day I face the pressures to sin that come from the world, the flesh, and the devil. But God’s Word promises that over all these enemies I can be “more than a conqueror through him who loved us.”

Question # 6: What four things does God counsel me to do so that my heart may be kept for Him?

A. First, I must guard my heart as if everything depended on it. This means that I should keep my heart like a sanctuary for the presence of the Lord Jesus and allow nothing and no one else to enter.

Second, I must keep my heart healthy by proper diet, growing strong on a regular diet of God’s Word—reading it for myself, meditating on its truth, but especially being fed on it in the preaching of the Word. I also will remember that my heart has eyes as well as ears. The Spirit shows me baptism as a sign that I bear God’s triune name, while the Lord’s Supper stimulates heart love for the Lord Jesus.

Third, I must take regular spiritual exercise, since my heart will be strengthened by worship when my whole being is given over to God in expressions of love for and trust in Him.

Fourth, I must give myself to prayer in which my heart holds on to the promises of God, rests in His will, and asks for His sustaining grace—and do this not only on my own but with others so that we may encourage one another to maintain a heart for God.

This—and much else—requires development, elaboration, and exposition. But it can be summed up in a single biblical sentence. Listen to your Father’s appeal: “My son, give Me your heart.” ~ **Dr. Sinclair Ferguson**



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Birthday and Anniversary Corner - September 2017

Birthdays

*Ben P. (3)
Zachary A. (9)
Jonathan D. (15)
Ruth T. (23)*

Anniversaries

None to Report

This is a picture that was taken at the McPhatter’s home on August 25th depicting a group of moms and young children from West Suffolk Baptist Church. This is their end of the summer swim date. It certainly looks very inviting, if I say so my self.



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.