



Volume 5 Issue 10

West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



October 2018

Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Keeping the Faith in a Faithless Age

“The greatest question of our time,” historian Will Durant offered, “is not communism versus individualism, not Europe versus America, not even East versus the West; it is whether men can live without God.” That question, it now appears, will be answered in our own day.

For centuries, the Christian church has been the center of Western civilization. Western culture, government, law, and society were based on explicitly Christian principles. Concern for the individual, a commitment to human rights, and respect for the good, the beautiful, and the true—all of these grew out of Christian convictions and the influence of revealed religion.

All of these, we now hasten to add, are under serious attack. The very notion of right and wrong is now discarded by large sectors of American society. Where it is not discarded, it is often debased. Taking a page out of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, modern secularists simply declare wrong, right, and right, wrong.

A NEW LANDSCAPE

Quaker theologian D. Elton Trueblood once described America as a “cut flower civilization.” Our culture, he argued, is cut off from its Christian roots like a flower cut at the stem. Though the flower will hold its beauty for a time, it is destined to wither and die.

When Trueblood spoke those words more than two decades ago, the flower still had some color and signs of life. But the blossom has long since lost its vitality, and it is time for the fallen petals to be acknowledged.

“If God does not exist,” Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov argued, “everything is permitted.” The permissiveness of modern American society can scarcely be exaggerated, but it can be traced directly to the fact that modern men and women act as if God does not exist or is powerless to accomplish His will.

The Christian church now finds itself facing a new reality. The church no longer represents the central core of Western culture. Though outposts of Christian influence remain, these are exceptions rather than the rule. For the most part, the church has been displaced by the reign of secularism.

The daily newspaper brings a constant barrage that confirms the current state of American society. This age is not the first to see unspeakable horror and evil, but it is the first to deny any consistent basis for identifying evil as evil or good as good.

The faithful church is, for the most part, tolerated as one voice in the public arena, but only so long as it does not attempt to exercise any credible influence on the state of affairs. Should the church speak forcefully to an issue of public debate, it is castigated as coercive and out of date.



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



Keeping the Faith in a Faithless Age - Cont'd

A NEW ROLE

How does the church think of itself as it faces this new reality? During the 1980s, it was possible to think in ambitious terms about the church as the vanguard of a moral majority. That confidence has been seriously shaken by the events of the past decade.

Little progress toward the re-establishment of a moral center of gravity can be detected. Instead, the culture has moved swiftly toward a more complete abandonment of all moral conviction.

The confessing church must now be willing to be a moral minority, if that is what the times demand. The church has no right to follow the secular siren call toward moral revisionism and politically correct positions on the issues of the day.

Whatever the issue, the church must speak as the church—that is, as the community of fallen but redeemed, who stand under divine authority. The concern of the church is not to know its own mind, but to know and follow the mind of God. The church's convictions must not emerge from the ashes of our own fallen wisdom but from the authoritative Word of God, which reveals the wisdom of God and His commands.

The church is to be a community of character. The character produced by a people who stand under the authority of the sovereign God of the universe will inevitably be at odds with a culture of unbelief.

AN OLD CALL

The American church faces a new situation. This new context is as current as the morning newspaper and as old as those first Christian churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Laodicea, and Rome. Eternity will record whether the American church is willing to submit only to the authority of God or whether the church will forfeit its calling in order to serve lesser gods.

The church must awaken to its status as a moral minority and hold fast to the gospel we have been entrusted to preach. In so doing, the deep springs of permanent truth will reveal the church to be a life-giving oasis amid America's moral desert. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*

Searching for Truth

Whenever people ask me what I do for a living, I respond by telling them I am a pastor. When I tell them I am a pastor, people appear to be instantly filled with a range of emotions as they try to figure out how to respond. Depending on their spiritual state and their relationship to Christ and the church, their responses range from fear to comfort, from anxiety to delight. Some people attempt to change the subject as quickly as possible, some want to tell me all about their spiritual journey, some want to unload all their burdens, some talk about why they left the church, and others rejoice in our common faith in Christ. But more often than not, when I tell people I'm a pastor, they have questions—questions about our church, about what I believe, about the Bible, God, and the afterlife. All people have questions. We are inquisitive by nature. And in this age of pluralism, atheism, and skepticism, many people are searching for truth and the answers to life's ultimate questions.



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



Searching for Truth - Cont'd

In some ways, pastors have more opportunities than other Christians to proclaim and explain the gospel and do the work of an evangelist and apologist. It is one of the joys of being a pastor. By the very nature of what we do, pastors are theologians and apologists. But in truth, every Christian is a theologian and an apologist. The question for all of us is whether we are good theologians and apologists and whether we are serious students of Scripture and the theology and answers that come from Scripture. Every Christian is called to be ready to give an answer for the hope that's within us, as Peter commands us, and never to forget that we are to give our answers with "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

As we do our good works before the watching world—not to be seen by men in order to get glory for ourselves, but so that the world might see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven—people will naturally ask us why we do all that we do, why we believe what we believe, and why we hold to the hope that is within us. And when they do, we must not be afraid, for Christ has promised that the Holy Spirit is with us to give us the courage and compassion to speak the truth in love. For this is one of the chief ways we shine as lights in the darkness of the world, knowing that people can only see the light if the Holy Spirit opens their eyes, expels the darkness, regenerates their hearts, and makes them alive to the light of the glory of Jesus Christ. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons** - Senior Pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow, chief publishing officer for Ligonier Ministries, and editor of *Tabletalk* magazine.

Biblical Authority

It's one of those moments we wish we could have seen firsthand. It took place in the square before the Water Gate. At daybreak, Ezra brought out the law. He unrolled the scroll and began reading. He kept on until noon, and all the while the great crowd gave their rapt attention. The law was read, interpreted, and studied. Nehemiah 8, which records this event, also tells us that this Bible study session resulted in worship. The people were humbled, and their faces looked to the ground. They bowed before God as He revealed Himself in His holy Word.

This event from the Old Testament is a precedent-setting moment. God's people gather, they hear God's Word read, they hear God's Word interpreted and taught, and they worship. This is how it's supposed to be. As the decades pass and generations come and go, however, God's Word sadly recedes from the center of His people's lives and from prominence in His congregation. The Old Testament prophets spoke of a famine of the Word of God. As we look through the pages of the Bible and through church history, we find such times of famine. One of the severest of these times of famine came on the eve of the Reformation.

Martin Luther originally launched his protest against the church over the issue of indulgences. He wanted a debate. While he was involved in various disputations in the wake of posting the Ninety-Five Theses, he finally got a real and true debate at Leipzig. Over the summer months, Luther squared off with Johann Eck, Rome's premier theologian. Over the course of the debate, Luther declared the Reformation plank of sola Scriptura, the firm and unwavering commitment to the absolute authority of Scripture. Luther's writings and the reports of these debates convinced Pope Leo X that this German monk was a heretic. The date and the time was set for the ultimate showdown: April 17–18, 1521, at the Imperial Diet, or meeting, at Worms.



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



Biblical Authority - Cont'd

Worms is another one of those moments that we all wish we could have seen first-hand. Luther, adorned in his simple monk's garb, stood before—and against—princes and nobles, cardinals and priests, all wearing the trappings of their offices. On the throne sat the twenty-one-year-old Charles V, the Holy Roman emperor. Luther's books were spread out on a table before him. He was commanded, “**Revoco!**” —to recant his writings, to recant his views of sola fide (faith alone as the instrument of justification) and of sola Scriptura. That was April 17. Luther asked for a day to consider, and he was granted it. He spent the night in prayer and appeared again the next day. Then, he delivered his famous speech:

I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. May God help me. Amen.

That moment led to one more moment that would have been wonderful to have seen firsthand. Actually, it was not a moment, but a few months, as Luther was holed up in Wartburg Castle overlooking the town of Eisenach. There he translated the Greek New Testament into German, and there, in his modest study, he wrote a series of sermons called the Church Postils (Kirchenpostille). The New Testament is, of course, the Word of God, and the Church Postils are a series of sermons that expound the Word of God. The Word needed to be proclaimed, but the Word also needed to be interpreted and taught. Ezra set the precedent in Nehemiah 8. Luther was not doing anything new. Instead, he was doing something very old.

Sola Scriptura may be considered a Reformation plank, but it is also, more accurately, a biblical one. It is fruitful, however, to consider how the Reformers thought of *sola Scriptura*. We see this best in the way Luther responded to his critics.

One of the incessant criticisms Luther received amounted to this: You have thrown away fifteen hundred years of church history. The second criticism was this: You have thrown away the church. By claiming that your conscience is captive to the Word of God, you need neither tradition nor the church. You need not bother with the communion of saints through the centuries or even now.

Luther was never one to back down from a fight, so he took these criticisms head on. Before we look at his criticisms, however, it is important to see how some people who profess *sola Scriptura* justify these objections. Some contemporary evangelicals take *sola Scriptura* to mean that they do not need teachers and that they can jettison two thousand years of church history. But the affirmation of *sola Scriptura* by Luther and the other Reformers was not a call for radical individualism or a rejection of church authority. One text that is helpful here is Luther's *On the Councils and the Church*.

In this text from 1539, Luther responds to two decades of criticism. One of the things he points out is the value of church history, the value of healthy tradition, and the value of the councils. It's a mistake to think that Luther thought so highly of his own views that he totally disregarded the views of all others. While not elevating tradition to the position of final authority, he did see it as necessary, helpful, and instructive. Tradition, to the Reformers, is a fallible authority, unlike Scripture, which is an infallible authority.



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



Biblical Authority - Cont'd

Paul tells Timothy to train faithful men who will be able to teach others. These are men entrusted with the “deposit of faith,” men who are trustworthy. They are to be trained by Timothy, who was trained by Paul. They, in turn, train others. The word Paul uses in 2 Timothy 2:2, translated as “entrusted,” means to hand over, as if you are passing on an inheritance. The word in the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible, is *tradidit*, from which we get the English word tradition. There is such a thing as a healthy tradition.

There is also such a thing as an unhealthy tradition. Luther points to a clear sign of unhealthy traditions: they exalt the externals, the forms, over internal realities and ultimately over Christ Himself. This happened among the Pharisees and Sadducees in the first century, and it happened in the sixteenth century. It happens in our day. A tradition is only healthy to the extent that it supports the centrality and prominence of the Word of God. Creeds do this. The orthodox teachings of the church councils and of the Reformers do this. Simply put, healthy tradition exalts Christ, the gospel, and sound doctrine; unhealthy tradition does not.

Luther had a place for tradition, and he also firmly believed in teachers. The New Testament sanctions the office of teacher. Yes, our consciences are held captive to the Word of God. And because of that, God has given us teachers to help us understand His Word, love His Word, and live out His Word in our lives.

As part of the communion of saints, we are not isolated from tradition or from the church. Keith Mathison, my colleague, put it succinctly: It's *sola Scriptura* (the Bible is the only infallible and final authority) not *solo Scriptura* (the Bible is the only authority). To affirm *sola Scriptura* is to understand the Bible's authority well and to understand it as the Reformers did.

Scripture is our only inerrant and infallible authority for faith and life. It is God's Word, God breathed. Therefore, we must obey it. We must strive not to see it displaced and cast aside but to see it placed at the center of all that we do. We can look back at moments when the Word was given its proper place. It happened among the exiles upon their return to Jerusalem as recorded in Nehemiah 8. It happened in the sixteenth century. Let us not lament that we did not see these moments first-hand. Instead, let us pray for our own moments when we put God's Word at the center, when we broadcast God's Word, and when we see it at work. ~ **Dr. Stephen J. Nichols - president of Reformation Bible College, chief academic officer of Ligonier Ministries, and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow.**

Passing Down the Truth of God

I learned a vital spiritual lesson while participating in a track meet during my college years. I was running in the 4x400-meter relay at the Orange County Invitational. As a baseball player moonlighting in track and field, I wasn't the fastest runner on our team. So, I ran the second leg.

Our strategy was simple. The first runner, a speedy sprinter, would get as big a lead as possible right out of the starting blocks. My job was merely to run a clean lap without dropping the baton. Our third man was strong and fast, and our fourth man was a blur. They could make up the whatever ground I might lose.



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



Passing Down the Truth of God - Cont'd

Several prestigious teams were competing that day, and our team managed to get into the finals. We were convinced we had a good shot at winning.

Our first man ran a great leg and made a perfect baton pass. I managed to finish my lap in a tight battle for first place. The third man went around the curve, came halfway down the back stretch, stopped, walked off, and sat down in the grass. The race kept going.

We thought he had pulled a hamstring or twisted an ankle. We all ran across the infield, expecting to find him writhing on the grass or at least wincing in pain. He wasn't. He was sitting passively. We anxiously asked, "What happened? Are you hurt?" He said, "No, I'm OK. I just didn't feel like running."

I confess that all my thoughts in that moment were carnal. My teammates and I spontaneously responded with an outpouring of frustration, all three of us basically saying the same thing: "You can't do that! You're not in this by yourself! Do you realize the effort we have all put into training for this? Too much has been invested in you!"

I've thought often about that moment in relation to our duty as believers. We are supposed to take the truth that was handed to us by our ancestors in the Christian faith and run with it—not aimlessly (1 Corinthians 9:26), but always pressing on toward the goal (Philippians 3:14)—so we can hand off the faith, intact and uncorrupted, to the next generation.

The Apostle Paul gave this charge to Timothy in his final epistle: "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul was facing imminent martyrdom (4:6), and he was of course concerned with the question of who would continue his missionary work and who would lead the church after his departure. He therefore outlined for Timothy this simple pattern of succession and stability.

The command itself looks beyond Timothy to younger men whom he would train. It lays out a perpetual strategy for raising up generation after generation of church leaders. The baton that was passed from Paul to Timothy would ultimately be handed off to faithful men, who in turn would pass it to a fourth generation—and so on.

Although Paul's primary concern here is leadership development, the principle he gives Timothy has clear implications for every Christian in the every era. We are all part of a living chain. Each of us has been taught by someone who learned the truth from someone else. If you follow that chain backward, link by link, it goes back to the original Apostles—and beyond them to Christ Himself.

In order to be faithful stewards of what we have received, each of us needs to pass on to others what we have been taught. In other words, every Christian ought to be a teacher. No matter who you are, you can find someone who knows less than you and teach them. That responsibility is inherent in our Lord's Great Commission: "Make disciples" (Matthew 28:19).



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



Passing Down the Truth of God - Cont'd

The writer to the Hebrews scolded believers who were derelict in this duty: “Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God” (5:12). Because of their failure to become teachers, they needed to start learning from the beginning again. No wonder. What you teach you retain, and what you don’t teach you tend to forget. Passing on what you have learned not only helps the person who is being discipled; it also strengthens the teacher.

Paul’s charge to Timothy is carefully focused. He doesn’t tell Timothy to be innovative. He doesn’t encourage him to adapt his style to the fads and fashions of secular culture. He doesn’t employ words like fresh, original, or imaginative, the verbal glue that binds so many twenty-first-century church-growth strategies together.

In fact, Paul gives Timothy practically the opposite mandate. It is a clear, narrowly defined directive. Timothy is to guard the deposit of truth he has received (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14) and pass it on, unmodified and unadulterated, to the next generation. Being an effective disciple-maker is not about being chic or creative. It’s about faithfully guarding “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and accurately transmitting it to an other generation.

It sounds paradoxical, but each Christian has a personal responsibility to keep the faith and to pass it on to others. That’s what is required of those who would win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:7).

Anyone who breaks that centuries-old chain is like a relay runner who abandons the race before finishing. And what’s at stake in this race is infinitely more important than any earthly trophy. Failure to run well and with endurance would be an inexcusable insult to our Lord, an offense against those who have taught us, a disappointment to those who have trained alongside us, and a grievous sin against those to whom we must hand the baton. ~ ***Dr. John MacArthur***



West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church



*“Thoughtfully Reformed -
Redemptively Relevant”*

Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Birthday and Anniversary Corner - October 2018

Birthdays

Charlene S. (3)

Anniversaries

None to Report

Waiting in Faith

When Abraham arrived in Canaan, it was by no means a great nation. But he dwelt there, living in tents. God may have prepared a mansion for him in heaven, but in Canaan all he had was a tent. The only parcel of Canaan he ever actually owned was his burial plot.

Most importantly, Abraham waited. This is perhaps the hardest test of faith. Unrealized expectations make for bitterness and despair in many people’s lives. But Abraham waited in faith, just as God later required of the prophet Habakkuk, when He said: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay” (Habakkuk 2:2–3).

Abraham waited in faith and died in faith. With the rest of the Old Testament saints, it was said: “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:39–40). ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



West Suffolk Leadership

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.
Office: 1001 Kenyon Court, Suffolk, VA 23435; **E-Mail:** pastorscofield@gmail.com
Website: www.westsuffolkbc.com **Phone/Fax:** 757-539-0363
Teaching Pastor/Elder: Ben Scofield, pastorscofield@gmail.com
Teaching Elders: Mike Myers, Mike Prince and Scott Thomas
Deacons: Marlin Halsey, John Hurst and John McPhatter
Editor: Walt Lawrence, gwlcf10415@gmail.com

Please submit information to Walt Lawrence by the second Sunday of each 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.

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.