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West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



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Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Death in the City

More than seventy killings took place in London in the first quarter of 2018. A surgeon in a London hospital reports that the number of children and young people being brought in with knife injuries is at an all-time high. This great city, blessed in the past by some of the greatest gospel preachers in church history, is waking up almost daily to headlines telling of another life snatched away.

Politicians debate increasing police funding. Newspapers argue about law enforcement. There is a place for that. But the root of the problem was described in a book aptly titled *Death in the City*, written nearly fifty years ago by the apologist Francis Schaeffer. In a culture that has deliberately turned away from God, what basis is there for morality?

Schaeffer warned that Western societies in the 1960s were living off the borrowed capital of a Christian worldview. That capital was fast running out. There was now no certain foundation for morality, no firm basis for ethics. Social breakdown would surely follow. *Death in the City* drew a series of comparisons between the plight of Western civilization and the collapse of social order in Jerusalem as depicted in the book of Jeremiah.

Back in the seventh century BC, despite repeated offers of grace, the people of Jerusalem deliberately turned away from the “fountain of living waters.” They preferred “broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). They believed lies. “Truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips” (7:28).

Jeremiah faced ridicule as he warned that seeking “freedom” from God’s moral laws leads down the blind alley of slavery to sin. He showed how “evil and bitter” it is to forsake the Lord Almighty (2:19). His most bitter opponents were found in the religious establishment. The “horrible and shocking” reality was that prophets and priests had led the race downward into rebellion (5:30–31). They denied that God would ever bring judgment:

*For from the least to the greatest of them,
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
and from prophet to priest,
everyone deals falsely.
They have healed the wound of my people lightly,
saying “Peace, peace,”
when there is no peace.
Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?
No, they were not at all ashamed;
they did not know how to blush. (Jeremiah 6:13–15)*



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Death in the City - Cont'd

This shameless behavior was designed to provoke God. It was actually self-destructive (7:18–19). God would turn His face away. Jerusalem would be left defenseless in the hands of ruthless enemies: “*Death has come up into our windows . . . cutting off the children from the streets*” (9:21).

Fast forward two and a half thousand years. Francis Schaeffer was horrified at the spectacle of liberal clergy denying the truth of God’s Word and ripping up the Ten Commandments. He compared them directly to King Jehoiakim, who cut up and burned Jeremiah’s prophecies as they were read out to him (chap. 36). *Honest to God* by Bishop John Robinson was published in 1963 to media acclaim. Having dumped the idea of a transcendent “God out there” and reduced Him to the “God within,” Robinson logically followed up with a call for “situational ethics.” “Moral absolutes” are a shackle, he argued. Liberation was urgent.

Schaeffer’s *Death in the City* (1969) and a string of other books such as *Escape from Reason* (1968) castigated the religious establishment for conniving with the irrationality of relativism rather than challenging it. False prophets in Jeremiah’s day painted evil as good and denied that there would be a judgement (14:14–15). It was even more repulsive when so-called Christian ministers with access to the revelation of God’s salvation in Christ painted evil as good and good as evil and laughed at the idea of wrath to come.

As we pray and as we work, we are to reflect that the more grotesque the enemies,
the greater the glory of the One beneath whose feet all enemies will be subjected.

Schaeffer explained that in the modern age, people had looked for answers to human problems by means of exercising human reason aside from God. That project had failed, giving way to postmodernism. Now the intellectual elite, including liberal theologians, scrambled around amid the wreckage of the postmodern rejection of all truth claims. As postmodern ideas filtered down to street level via entertainment and the media, it left humanity adrift in an ocean of unreason.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem consistently rejected the message of the prophet Jeremiah. They mocked him, insulted him, and plotted his death. He was put in stocks, imprisoned, and ultimately confined in a vile cistern. Yet always he longed for their salvation and wept over their doom (9:1).

Schaeffer also wept. Daily, he and his wife, Edith, listened to the stories of young people whose lives seemingly had no purpose. Many of them found their way to the Schaeffer’s home high in the Swiss Alps. L’Abri (French for “shelter”) was a refuge for the victims of a culture that denied human beings meaning, dignity, and hope. Schaeffer felt their pain. By patient questioning and logical reasoning, he exposed the folly, futility, and inconsistency of a godless worldview. His message carried weight because he was not insulated from the heartbreak that lies bring in their wake. The stories of many who turned up at L’Abri bore witness to the reality that the evil one seeks only to steal, kill, and destroy. Schaeffer was not a detached academic. He grieved for people.

When asked what he had learned at L’Abri, Dr. Donald Drew simply said, “*I’ve learned to cry.*”



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Death in the City - Cont'd

Schaeffer felt deep love and compassion for those deceived by Satan's lies. But he felt intense anger toward false teachers who promoted deception. This emotional, spiritual, and intellectual energy found expression in twenty-two books. A recurring theme, found first in his early book *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (1972), is that denial of the truth claims of the Bible leaves people with no certain ground for knowing anything, no basis for existence, and no firm foundation for ethics. The Christian message, grounded in spacetime history, is the only workable solution for the predicament of meaninglessness that logically leads to despair. He popularized his key ideas in two influential film series (*Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* and *How Should We Then Live?*). These had a galvanizing effect among evangelicals, pushing many out of their previous passivity regarding abortion and other ethical issues.

Half a century on from the publication of Schaeffer's seminal books *The God Who Is There* and *Escape from Reason* (1968), our culture spins ever faster into irrationality. Schaeffer predicted that plunging below the "line of despair" would lead to social collapse just as surely as the Roman Empire collapsed amid decadence, self-indulgence, and immorality. Others (both Christian and non-Christian) sounded alarms as well. Philip Rieff warned in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966) that a society released from all restraints would implode. Christopher Lasch argued in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) that no community can flourish where every individual focuses on "self-fulfillment" and where self-control is excoriated as repressive.

Now we look out on our city and see not only the collapse of any consensus on ethics and morality but also the weakening of any agreement on human identity itself. The fundamental binary of male and female is denied in the cause of "liberation." Our natural bonds of humanity dissolve in the fragmentation of identity politics.

It feels as though we are standing in the ruins. Lament is right and proper. Our witness to God's good design for humanity and our proclamation of the good news will be delivered with power only when we have first felt the tragedy of death in the city.

Do we weep at the millions of baby lives snuffed out before they see the light of day? Do we mourn the way our children are robbed of their innocence, exposed to sexual immorality by the dogmas of the sex education lobby? Do we grieve that family breakdown tears so many children away from one or both of their natural parents? Are we appalled that the truth of creation is regarded as so toxic that many forbid it to be taught in schools? Do we cry when we see physicians experimenting with the perfectly healthy bodies of young people in the name of a radical gender ideology which has no basis in science or reason? Are we horrified that so many around us are headed toward a lost eternity while "Christian" clergy insist that sin is not sin, that there will be no day of judgment, and that hell is a medieval myth?

Yet, the Word of God stands. King Jehoiakim cut up and burned Jeremiah's prophecy. Where is that king now? He is forgotten, but God's Word endures.

Sin is sin. There will be a day of judgment. Hell is real. Schaeffer insisted that we must preach "down" into the current generation, exposing the "*lostness of the lost.*" But we don't stop there. We live in gospel days and we have good news to proclaim. Jeremiah was given a glorious vision of hope beyond the fall of Jerusalem, a vision pointing forward to the coming of the Savior who would come to seek and to save the lost:



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Death in the City - Cont'd

In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: The Lord is our righteousness. (Jeremiah 23:6)

Schaeffer insisted that it is the godless worldview that leads to despair. God's people may rightly lament. But we must never despair. Rather, we should pray and work for reformation and revival.

As we pray and as we work, we are to reflect that the more grotesque the enemies, the greater the glory of the One beneath whose feet all enemies will be subjected (1 Corinthians 15:25–26). We are to remember that throughout human history, while mighty empires have collapsed, the kingdom of God has endured. The stone that struck them *“became a great mountain and filled the whole earth”* (Daniel 2:35). And we are to have confidence that the earth will be filled ~ *Dr. Sharon James - Social policy analyst for the Christian Institute*

Theologian for the Ages: John Calvin

John Calvin (1509–1564) is easily the most important Protestant theologian of all time and remains one of the truly great men who have lived. A world-class theologian, a renowned teacher, an ecclesiastical statesman, and a valiant Reformer, Calvin is seen by many as the greatest influence on the church since the first century. Apart from the biblical authors themselves, Calvin stands as the most influential minister of the Word the world has ever seen. Philip Melancthon revered him as the most able interpreter of Scripture in the church, and therefore labeled him simply “the theologian.” And Charles Spurgeon said that Calvin *“propounded truth more clearly than any other man that ever breathed, knew more of Scripture, and explained it more clearly.”*

Calvin was born on July 10, 1509, to Gerard and Jeanne Cauvin in the French cathedral city of Noyon, some sixty miles north of Paris. Gerard was a notary, or financial administrator, for the Roman Catholic bishop of the Noyon diocese and, thus, a member of the professional class. At age fourteen, John entered the leading educational institution of Europe, the University of Paris, to study theology in preparation for the priesthood. There, he was immersed in the principles of the Renaissance, humanism, and scholarship. A serious and remarkably learned young man, he graduated with a master's degree (1528).

Soon after Calvin's graduation, Gerard fell into a conflict with the bishop of Noyon, and this falling-out with the church caused him to redirect his brilliant son to the study of law at the universities of Orléans (1528) and later Bourges (1529). Calvin learned Greek and sharpened his skills in analytical thinking and persuasive argument, skills he would use with great effect in the pulpit in Geneva. But when Gerard unexpectedly died (1531), Calvin, twenty-one years old, moved back to Paris to pursue his great love, the study of classical literature. He would later return to Bourges, where he completed his legal studies and received his law degree in 1532.

Suddenly Converted

While he was a student at the University of Orléans, Calvin encountered some of the early reform ideas through Martin Luther's writings, which were widely discussed in academic circles. Subsequently, Calvin was converted to Christ. Calvin recorded a testimony of his conversion in the preface to his Commentary on the Book of Psalms (1557):



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To this pursuit [of the study of law] I endeavored faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of His providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. At first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardor.

In November 1533, Nicolas Cop, rector of the University of Paris and a friend of Calvin, preached the opening address of the winter term at the university. The message was a plea for reformation on the basis of the New Testament and a bold attack on the Scholastic theologians of the day. Cop encountered strong resistance to his “Luther-like” views. Calvin is believed to have collaborated with Cop on the address, as a copy of the manuscript exists in Calvin’s handwriting. As a result, Calvin was forced to flee Paris before he could be arrested. He withdrew to the estate of Louis du Tillet, a well-to-do man who was sympathetic to the Reformation cause. There, in du Tillet’s extensive theological library, Calvin read the Bible along with the writings of the Church Fathers, most notably Augustine. By hard work, genius, and grace, Calvin was becoming a self-taught theologian of no small stature.

In 1534, Calvin moved to Basel, Switzerland, which had become a Protestant stronghold, in order to study in solitude. In Basel, he penned the first edition of what would become his theological masterpiece and the single most important book written during the Reformation, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In it, he outlined the fundamentals of the Protestant faith and presented a compelling argument for the Reformed interpretation of Scripture. Amazingly, Calvin began this work at age twenty-five, only one year after his conversion. It was published when he was twenty-six.

In 1536, Calvin decided to move to Strasbourg, in southwest Germany, to further his studies as a quiet scholar. But a war between Francis I and Charles V, the Holy Roman emperor, prevented him from taking the most direct route. Calvin was forced to detour to Geneva, where he intended to spend only one night. But when he entered the city, he was immediately recognized as the young author of the *Institutes*. Those sympathetic to the Reformation took him to meet William Farel, who had led the Protestant movement in Geneva for ten years. Geneva had recently voted to leave the Roman Catholic Church and become a Reformation city, but it was in dire need of a teacher who could articulate Reformed truths. The fiery Farel challenged Calvin to take up the task; when Calvin hesitated, Farel resorted to an imprecatory threat. Calvin reports it this way:

Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after having learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken.



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Calvin began his ministry in Geneva as a lecturer, then as a pastor. Along with Farel, he began the task of bringing the life and practice of the church into accord with the teaching of Scripture. Among the reforms he implemented was the exercise of church discipline at the Communion table. This did not sit well with prominent Geneva citizens, many of whom were living sinful lives. This crisis reached the boiling point on Easter Sunday, April 23, 1538, when Calvin refused to administer Communion to certain leading people who were living in open sin. The tensions grew so great that Calvin and Farel were forced to leave Geneva.

Exile and Return

Calvin withdrew to Strasbourg, where he had intended to go two years earlier. His purpose was to escape from the public eye. But Strasbourg's chief Reformer, Martin Bucer, insisted that Calvin must continue in public pulpit ministry and threatened him much as Farel had earlier. Yielding to Bucer, Calvin became the pastor of nearly five hundred Protestant refugees from France.

However, this theologian-in-exile was also given time and freedom to write in Strasbourg. Calvin wrote his Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and enlarged his Institutes, translating it into French. At this same time, he wrote what has been hailed as the greatest apologetic for the Reformation, *A Reply to Sadoletto*. After Calvin's departure from Geneva, Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto had written an open letter to the people of the city, inviting them to return to the Roman Catholic Church. The city fathers appealed to Calvin to respond, which he did with his Reply, a compelling defense of the glory of God in the gospel of grace. Also during his time in Strasbourg, he married Idelette de Bure, a widow with two children, who brought him much happiness.

After Calvin had spent three happy years in Strasbourg, the city fathers of Geneva wrote to ask him to return as their pastor. In his absence, the religious and political situation had deteriorated. Initially, Calvin had no intention of returning. In a letter to Farel on March 29, 1540, he said, "*Rather would I submit to death a hundred times than to that cross, on which one had to perish daily a thousand times over.*" But Calvin eventually changed his mind, despite the many dangers he knew awaited him in Geneva. Calvin saw his life in Christ entirely and willingly given to God, an attitude depicted in his personal seal—a hand holding a heart, with the motto beneath: "*My heart I give Thee, Lord, eagerly and earnestly.*" He bowed to what he believed to be God's will and returned to his pastorate in Switzerland.

Calvin arrived in Geneva on September 13, 1541, after an absence of three and a half years. In his first sermon, he resumed his exposition of Scripture at the next verse after the last one he had covered before being exiled. This continuation was intended as a bold statement that verse-by-verse preaching of the Word would hold the primary place in his ministry.

Calvin's second Genevan pastorate had two periods. The first was the years of opposition (1541–1555), when he endured much resistance and difficulty. The opposition began to manifest itself in the form of the Patriots, the oldest, most influential families of Geneva. They disliked Calvin in large measure because he was a foreigner. He also faced the resistance of the Libertines, people within Geneva who were antinomians, living in open sin and immorality. But most demanding by far was the ordeal caused by Michael Servetus in 1553.



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This known heretic was burned at the stake by the city fathers after Calvin had been called as an expert witness. In other trials during this time, Calvin's son, Jacques, died only two weeks after his birth in 1542, and Calvin's wife, Idelette, died in 1549 after only nine years of marriage.

This draining opposition finally subsided, and the last nine years of Calvin's life (1555–1564) could be described as the years of support. At long last, Calvin gained the support of the city fathers. With this backing, he established the Geneva Academy in 1559, based on the example he had seen in Strasbourg. The academy had a private school for elementary instruction and a public school offering more advanced studies in biblical languages and theology to train ministers, lawyers, and doctors. Also in 1559, the fifth and final edition of the Institutes was released. In 1560, the Geneva Bible was released, an English translation that was the first Bible with theological notes in the margins. This monumental work, produced by men under Calvin's teaching, presented a worldview of the sovereignty of God over all creation.

Calvin dispatched French-speaking pastors, whom he had trained for the gospel ministry, from Geneva to other French-speaking provinces in Europe. Most went to France, where the Reformed movement grew to encompass about one-tenth of the population. Eventually, thirteen hundred Geneva-trained missionaries went to France. By 1560, more than a hundred underground churches had been planted in France by men sent out from Geneva. By 1562, the number of churches had multiplied to as many as 2,150, with more than 3 million members. The membership of some of the churches numbered in the thousands. This growth produced a Huguenot church that almost overcame the Catholic Counter-Reformation in France. Further, Geneva-trained missionaries planted churches in Italy, Hungary, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, England, Scotland, and the Rhineland—even Brazil.

A Farewell Address

In early 1564, Calvin became seriously ill. He preached for the last time from the pulpit of Saint Peter's Cathedral on Sunday, February 6. By April, it was obvious that he did not have long to live. Calvin, age fifty-four, faced death as he had faced the pulpit—with great resolution. The strength of his faith, built on the sovereignty of God, appears in his last will and testament. On April 25, 1564, Calvin dictated the following words:

I render thanks to God, not only because he has had compassion on me, His poor creature, to draw me out of the abyss of idolatry in which I was plunged, in order to bring me to the light of His gospel and make me a partaker of the doctrine of salvation, of which I was altogether unworthy, and continuing His mercy He has supported me amid so many sins and short-comings, which were such that I well deserved to be rejected by Him a hundred thousand times—but what is more, He has so far extended His mercy towards me as to make use of me and of my labour, to convey and announce the truth of His gospel.



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Three days later, on April 28, 1654, Calvin called his fellow ministers to his bedchamber and issued his farewell address to them. He cautioned them that the battles of the Reformation were not over, but only beginning: *“You will have troubles when God shall have called me away... . But take courage and fortify yourselves, for God will make use of this church and will maintain it, and assures you that He will protect it.”* With that, he passed the torch from his feeble hands to theirs.

Calvin died on May 27, 1564, in the arms of Theodore Beza, his successor. Calvin’s last words - *“How long, O Lord?”*—were the very words of Scripture (Psalm 79:5; 89:46). He died quoting the Bible he had so long preached. Appropriately, this humble servant was buried in a common cemetery in an unmarked grave—at his own request. ~ *Dr. Steven Lawson - President and founder of OnePassion Ministries*

The Grace Of Regeneration

God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” (vv. 4–5) (Ephesians 2:1-9)

John Calvin makes the point that “everything connected with our salvation ought to be ascribed to God as its author.” This statement is quite radical in light of common beliefs about salvation that we find in the Christian community. Most professing Christians are happy to attribute their salvation to divine grace. Few would say that they deserve heaven. Yet when questions are asked about the reasons why people choose faith in Christ, many believers are unwilling to say that God chooses some for salvation or authors their decision to believe. In the name of a particular view of free will that says we must, at every point, have the equal ability to choose between right and wrong, many Christians end up denying—perhaps without meaning to—God’s sovereign, effectual grace.

Calvin takes from Scripture his view that every part of salvation is authored by God. This includes even our decision to believe. We believe only because the Lord makes us willing to believe. Apart from grace, we are fully unwilling to believe. Our hearts are dead in sin, and dead hearts—just like dead bodies—cannot move of their own accord (Ephesians 2:1–3). We must not stretch the metaphor too far; Paul is not saying that human beings are unable to make choices without God’s grace. Unredeemed sinners, after all, make choices every day. What the Apostle means is that unless God’s grace resurrects our dead hearts, we cannot make decisions that are pleasing to the Lord. *“Those who are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Romans 8:8), and to be dead in trespasses and sin is to be in or controlled by the flesh.

If we are dead with respect to the things of God, unable to choose what the Lord finds pleasing—and He certainly approves of the choice to repent and believe in Christ alone for salvation—then our Creator must intervene drastically if we are to be redeemed. He changes our hearts without our asking Him to do so, making us willing to believe. This work is referred to in theological categories as God’s work of regeneration, and it is described in Ephesians 2:4–7. Even while we were dead in our trespasses, the Lord brought us to new spiritual life and, as a consequence, we believed. Faith does not precede regeneration. It is not that we believe and then our hearts are changed; rather, we believe after God first changes our hearts. *Regeneration precedes faith*, which is a gift, part of what is *“not our own doing”* (vv. 8–10). Having been given new hearts, we cannot help but believe. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



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Birthdays and Anniversary Corner - November 2018

Birthdays

Brenda A. (1)
LeAnn M. (10)
Audrey D. (11)
Luke P. (15)
Walt L. (20)

Anniversaries

Gene and Brenda A. (22)
Marlin and Sadie H. (22)

Unraveling the Mystery

The place we will occupy in the future will be similar to places we occupy now, but there will also be differences. The heavenly place will be a place of manifest glory. Our bodies will have continuity with our present bodies. There will also be discontinuity. Our new bodies are shrouded in mystery—we see through the glass darkly. Yet we receive hints about our glorified bodies by comparisons with Jesus, as well as by His words that we will be “like the angels” (Matthew 22:30).

Paul gives further hints: After discussing various kinds of bodies we experience on this planet, and various levels of glory of created objects, he adds: “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory, it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42–44, NIV).

We understand corruption, dishonor, weakness, and natural bodies. Only by contrast or eminence do we contemplate an incorruptible, glorified, powerful, spiritual body. The new body will be clothed with immortality. It will receive a garment it does not presently or intrinsically possess.



West Suffolk Leadership

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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.

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