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Special Edition

# *West Suffolk Epistle*

## *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

*“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”*



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*Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America*

### *The Meaning of Baptism*

*“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).*

Paul tells us in Romans 4:11 that circumcision, and therefore baptism (Colossians 2:8–15), is a sign. **[Editor’s Note: Dr. Sproul is speaking from the perspective of Presbyterian Doctrine. A Baptist might instead say, “Paul tells us in Romans 4:11 that baptism, like circumcision, is a sign (Colossians 2:8-15.)”]** Now signs, it is well known, point beyond themselves to signify something else, but they are not in themselves that which they signify. For example, a sign on a highway reading “Washington D.C., 23 miles” points to a city 23 miles away, but the sign is not the city of Washington. Likewise, baptism signifies something beyond itself but in itself is not the thing that is signified.

Today’s passage alludes to some of the realities to which baptism points. First is our ingrafting into Christ and His body. In John 15:1–17, Jesus describes Himself as the vine in whom we the branches must abide. We must be ingrafted into this vine by faith — we must enter into a living, vital, and salvific relationship with Him. This idea is prevalent in the New Testament where to believe in the Lord is to believe “into” (from the Greek word *eis*) Christ. Moreover, when we trust in Jesus we are not alone. The Christian community enters into union with the Savior by believing in His name. If I am in Christ and my friend is in Christ, we experience union with each other in some sense. We all become part of the “one body,” as today’s passage indicates. Paul also describes this union with other Christians in Romans 11:11–24, where believing Gentiles become one with faithful Israelites.

Baptism also signifies regeneration and the remission of sins (John 3:5; Acts 2:38). Apart from the direct work of the Holy Spirit, we are dead in sin and cannot trust in Jesus. He alone can renew our hearts and create a disposition inclined toward God and His Messiah (Ephesians 2:1–10). The sacrament of baptism signifies that the Lord has done this for His people — He has regenerated our hearts. Water symbolizes the new life the Spirit brings, and its washing effect points to the cleansing from sin that results from faith in Christ.

Finally, having the sign does not necessarily mean we have the reality. We can trust in the rite of baptism without having faith, and if so, neither ingrafting, regeneration, nor remission has happened. But for those of faith, the Holy Spirit works through baptism to remind them of His work and, consequently, to strengthen faith. ~ **Dr. R.C Sproul, Sr.**

#### ***Coram Deo***

Whenever we read the Nicene Creed we confess belief in the communion of saints. This means that we become united to every believer who has ever lived whenever we trust in Jesus. The other Christians we know are not merely acquaintances; we are one body with them in Christ. Think of some people in your church whom you do not know well. Make plans to get together with them and fellowship as a way to display the unity we all have in Christ.



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On December 2, 2018 two families united with us in membership. One of those families united with us in Baptism. Please welcome Jeremy and Jessie Williams and their oldest daughter Savanna as new members of West Suffolk. As a profession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ they also were baptized by our pastor. In addition, please welcome Rick and Peggy Griggs as new members as well.



*Jeremy Williams*



*Jessie Williams*



*Savanna Williams*



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### *The Church is Not a Drive-Through Restaurant*

Paul describes the unity and diversity of gifts in the body of Christ by saying: “*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good*” (1 Corinthians 12:4–7). All of us are gifted from the same Spirit; all of us are called to serve in the power of the same Lord; all of us are called to be active by the same God; all of us have gifts to serve the common good. As Paul goes on to say to the Corinthians, “all were made to drink of one Spirit” (v. 13).

What is this “*common good*” of which Paul speaks? It is that God is glorified in the midst of the congregation; for example, in singing. What are you doing to bring that about? The common good is that the lost come to hear the gospel and be saved. What are you doing to serve that glorious purpose, to spread the seed of the Word? The common good is that those in the church who are hurting find healing, the broken find restoration, and the weak find strength. What are you doing to serve others who seem to be hurting, broken, and weak?

Because of cultural influences on the church in America in our time, we tend to treat the church like a drive-through restaurant. We think to ourselves, “*It will always be there and it will always have what I want, when I want it.*” So, some of us attend worship once a week, some twice a month, and, sadly, some of us only occasionally. We come to get something and to leave. If it is not there, we go somewhere else. Others of us treat the church like any ordinary social club, a PTA meeting, a family reunion, or a gathering of friends. We come expecting to talk about work, football, and the latest gossip. We do all of this because we are sinners to be sure, but also because we are products of the world around us.

We need to stop treating the church this way. The church is a body, not a drive-through. It is a group of living people. The church is a spiritual place, not a social club. When we come on the Lord’s Day, we need to expect that God is going to meet with us in the power of His Holy Spirit. Further, we need to expect that there will be others there who need our spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit gives each of us gifts for the common good, so we need to shift our focus from ourselves and use our gifts to serve and edify others. If each of us thinks of ways to serve others—and not how we need to be served—the entire body will function healthily. ~ *Reverend Daniel R. Hyde is senior minister of Oceanside Reformed Church in Oceanside, Calif.*



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### *Why Church Membership?*

Thousands upon thousands of evangelical churches today have no formal membership process. Furthermore, many Christians never join a church or see any reason for doing so. Perhaps it's because they don't see church membership taught in the Bible. Or they've been hurt by a church in the past and are reluctant to get hurt again. Or they are confused by the plethora of Christian denominations and ministries out there these days and can't decide what to do. Or they simply enjoy living on the periphery of a local fellowship and don't want to give up their independence. Whatever the case, they are missing something very important to their spiritual growth and the advance of the gospel.

Why should we insist that a follower of Christ become a committed, active member of a local church? I can think of at least nine reasons.

**First**, church membership helps us guard the peace and purity of the church. In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus explains how to handle conflict with another Christian. A key part of His teaching is to “*tell it to the church*” when other avenues of resolution fail. Unless we are committed members of a church, it's difficult to see how we would practically apply this command.

**Second**, church membership provides the privilege of accountability to church leaders. Hebrews 13:17 says, “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.*” If we hop from church to church, or refuse to join a church, how will we obey this verse? And if there are no criteria to determine who is “*inside the church*” and “*outside*” (1 Corinthians 5:12–13), for whom are church leaders responsible?

**Third**, church membership gives a tangible way to express commitment to a family of believers. It's great to say in a general way that we love the church of God. But it's even better to get up in front of a church, look brothers and sisters in the eye, and affirm a set of commitments, vows, or promises. In my denomination, a person must affirm five vows to become a member of one of our churches. It takes courage to make those promises and even more courage to stick to them. But there is great blessing in making a verbal commitment of love to a group of believers.

**Fourth**, church membership provides a profound means of telling the world that we are followers of Christ. In Mark 8:38 Jesus says, “*Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*” Of course, there are many ways to share our faith with others. But to say that we are members of a particular church is a great way to come out of hiding and witness to unbelieving friends, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers.

**Fifth**, church membership pulls us into the grand story of God's covenant love. God has made a covenant with us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Covenant speaks of a costly commitment sealed with an inviolable promise. The covenantal nature of church membership is very precious to God, and when we covenant with other believers we are imitating God. As Walter Henegar has put it: “*The Church is the Bride of Christ. He has sworn himself to her—and to us. Should we not do the same?*”



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### *Why Church Membership?- Cont'd*

*Church membership provides a profound means of telling the world that we are followers of Christ.*

**Sixth**, church membership encourages participation in the work of the church. In Ephesians 4:16, Paul speaks about each part of the body doing its share of the work. By formally committing ourselves to a local church, we will also feel a healthy obligation to contribute our time, talents, and treasure to the ministry of that church.

**Seventh**, church membership helps us distinguish between “neighbor” and “household of faith.” God calls us to love everyone. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. But Galatians 6:10 says, “*Let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith*” (emphasis added). Paul is making some distinction here between the quality of love we give to non-Christians and that which we give to our fellow Christians. But how do we know who belongs to the household of faith? When we go through the process of church membership, we normally have to profess our faith to a governing body of church leaders. This process helps identify (not infallibly, of course) false professions as opposed to true professions.

**Eighth**, church membership prevents us from showing favoritism. Because we are sinners, we gravitate toward people who are like us, even within the church. We form cliques. We avoid difficult people. But when we become church members, we realize we cannot do that; we cannot pick favorites. We are part of a family, and all members of that family are equally important. That’s the point of Paul’s discussion about the church in 1 Corinthians 12:21: “*The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’*” In other words, church membership tames our sinful, selfish nature.

**Ninth** and finally, church membership helps to prevent us from trying to go it alone. This was implied in some of the other reasons, but it deserves to be repeated. I am growing more and more tired of the “*me and Jesus*” view of the Christian life. The older I get, the more I see how much I need the family of God. As a church member, I am able to remind myself often that “*two are better than one*” (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

If you are not a member of a church, I urge you to seriously consider the benefits and duty of committing yourself to a body of believers through membership. Every church does it somewhat differently and has its own pathway to formal membership. The point is, it’s important to be an accountable, contributing member of a congregation of God’s people. ~ **Reverend Michael Osborne is associate pastor of University Presbyterian Church in Orlando, Fla.**



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Below is a picture of the Williams and Griggs Family reading the church covenant with the church body affirming our commitment to one another. Below that picture are the Williams Family (Jeremy/Jessie/Savanna) and Rick and Peggy Griggs - our new covenant members.





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### *The Point of the Parable of the Vineyard*

Jesus made a regular habit of upending established social conventions. The Lord spent much of His earthly ministry illustrating the sharp contrast between the world and His heavenly kingdom. One of those key teaching moments is found in the preface and epilogue to Christ's parable of the vineyard.

Christ's story is framed with a single, simple proverb: *"Many who are first will be last; and the last, first"* (Matthew 19:30). The same concept is repeated at the end of the parable: *"So the last shall be first, and the first last"* (Matthew 20:16). An echo of the proverb is also found in the parable itself—in that key phrase in Matthew 20:8 where the landowner instructs the steward how to pay the workers their wages: *"Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first"* (Matthew 20:8)

Jesus used variations of that same proverb on other occasions. We find it, for example, in Luke 13:30: *"And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last"*; and in Mark 10:31: *"Many who are first will be last, and the last, first."*

The proverb is also something of a riddle. What does it mean? It's not saying precisely the same thing as Mark 9:35: *"If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."* Or Mark 10:43–44: *"Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all."* Those verses elevate humility and self-sacrifice. Those are imperatives: commands instructing us to be humble servants rather than seeking prominence and power.

But the proverb that goes with this parable is an indicative, a simple statement of fact: *"The last shall be first, and the first last."* What does that mean, and how would it work? In a foot race, for example, the only way for the last to be first and the first to be last is for everyone to finish simultaneously. If everyone crosses the finish line at exactly the same instant, the first are last and the last are first. Everyone ends in a dead heat.

That, of course, is precisely the point Jesus was making in the parable. Those hired first and those hired last all got exactly the same pay. All of them, from the first to the last, got the full benefit of the landowner's generosity, in equal shares.

What spiritual lesson is woven into that story?

The lesson is actually quite simple: the story is a precise picture of God's sovereign, saving grace. Since sinners are all unworthy, and the riches of God's grace are inexhaustible, all believers receive an infinite and eternal share of His mercy and kindness, though no one really deserves it. *"In Him we [all of us] have [complete] redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace"* (Ephesians 1:7). He *"raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 2:6–7 NKJV, emphasis added). That speaks of all who are redeemed. It is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom (Luke 12:32)—all of them, and in equal abundance.

The dying thief who repented in his final moments entered paradise, where he is enjoying eternal life and everlasting fellowship with Christ just the same as Peter, James, and John, who literally gave their lives in service to the Savior.



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### *The Point of the Parable of the Vineyard - Cont'd*

The landowner in the parable represents God. The vineyard is the kingdom, the sphere of God's rule. The laborers are believers, people who come into the service of the King. The day of work is their lifetime. The evening is eternity. The steward, perhaps, represents Jesus Christ, to whom has been committed all judgment. The denarius represents eternal life.

**Note:** this pay is not something the workers have earned. It is not given to them like a minimum wage in a fair exchange for labor done. It is far too much for that. Rather, this represents a gracious gift, a lavish endowment that exceeds the best reward any day worker could ever merit.

So this is the point: If you are a genuine believer, you receive the full benefits of God's immeasurable grace, just like everyone else in God's kingdom. Your place in heaven is not a timeshare where your access is determined by the length of time you spent doing the Lord's work. The blessings of redemption are not doled out in quotas based on one's personal achievements. Forgiveness is not measured by weighing our good deeds against our sins, nor is it partially withheld if we have sinned for too long or too badly.

Everyone who enters the kingdom receives the full abundance of God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness. That's true no matter how long you have worked in God's kingdom. It's true no matter how hard or how easy your circumstances are. It's true whether your service was minimal or maximal; whether you die as a martyr in the prime of life or live a fairly peaceful life and die of old age. It's as true of those who come to Christ in adolescence as it is of those who genuinely repent of their sins at the end of a profligate life.

When this earthly life is over, if you are a believer, you will go to be with Christ, just like that thief on the cross (Luke 23:43); just like the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 5:8); and just like every other saint who has died since.

Heaven is not a reward for long service or hard work. Some people serve Christ their entire lives, and some for a very short time. We all enter into the same eternal life. We all will receive the same spiritual blessings in heaven.

If that seems inequitable, remember that it is far more than any of us deserve. The benefits of the kingdom are the same for everyone because we are redeemed in the first place only by God's grace, and nothing else. That's truly good news for you and me; we don't have to earn our way into the kingdom. Heaven is not based on our merit. **Remember:** *"The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips."* (Proverbs 16:23 ESV) ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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### *Cookie Exchange December 8, 2018*

On December 18th we had our annual Cookie Exchange at West Suffolk. The event started at 11:30 AM through 12:30 PM. The whole idea was for families to make their favorite cookies to share and to bring along their recipes to share with one another. I have included some pictures that were taken by our own Elder Scott Thomas.





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## *Rediscovering the Law*

Israel’s reformation came via a rediscovery of the law, which created a brief awakening to the bankruptcy of a corrupt nation. As a young man, King Josiah began the process of reformation with a spiritual purge, a cleansing of pagan elements from the religious life of the nation.

A few years later, Hilkiah found the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses. A scribe brought the book to King Josiah and read it to him. The result was dramatic: “Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes” (2 Kings 22:11).

Josiah was awakened to the greatness of the wrath of God. He realized that God had been pouring out that wrath on the nation of Israel. He further understood that this divine judgment on the nation was a direct result of sin.

The most apparent immediate change in the national reform of Israel was seen in the restoration of true worship, a worship purged of idolatry and rooted in a sound understanding of the character of God and of His law.

We need a new discovery of the law of God and the Word of God in our land. Yes, it needs to be rediscovered in the public square—but even more importantly it must be rediscovered in the house of God.



**West Suffolk Baptist Church  
Leadership**

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Please submit information to the editor 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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