



Volume 6 Issue 3

West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



March 2019

Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Our Ancient Foe

Talk of the Devil and spiritual warfare makes some people roll their eyes. We live in an age of particle accelerators, microchips, and organ transplants. The Devil? Why, he’s nothing more than a medieval superstition created to scare naughty children. We can’t take any of that seriously.

Martin Luther would have disagreed. He took it very seriously and wrote often of his ongoing battle with the Devil. He was very aware of the forces of evil. Most of us have heard the story about Luther throwing an inkwell at the Devil. Whether truth or legend, such an act would not have been out of character for Luther. It is also well known that Luther believed in using contempt to fight the Devil, and some of the things he said to and about the Devil were colorful, to say the least.

According to the skeptics, Luther may have meant well, but his encounters with “the Devil” say more about his fragile mental state than they do about reality. This is what our demythologized world would have us believe, and, frankly, it is what the Devil himself would have us believe. As the French poet Charles Baudelaire said, “The devil’s best trick is to persuade you that he doesn’t exist!”

Luther’s language about the Devil wasn’t always crude. Sometimes he was more tactful. His hymn, “*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*” is a magnificent description of spiritual warfare and our place in it.

*A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

The Devil is quite real, and there is a spiritual war going on every minute of every day (Revelation 12:17). It was foretold by God when He cursed the Serpent and said, “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring*” (Genesis 3:15). This war is not a dualistic Manichaeian battle between two essentially equal forces, good and evil, light and darkness. Satan is not omnipotent or omniscient. God alone is sovereign and all-powerful. All that the Devil does is done only by God’s permission and ultimately will be used by God for His own purposes.



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Our Ancient Foe - Cont'd

*Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

It is important for believers to understand that the outcome of this war is not uncertain. As God also said to the Serpent, *“He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* The decisive battle has already been won at the cross. The Devil may have thought he had won when Jesus was crucified, but this was actually the point in redemptive history when his head was crushed. It was by means of His death on the cross that Jesus destroyed the Devil (Hebrews 2:14).

Some theologians have used World War II as an analogy of what happened. The cross was D-Day in the spiritual war. It was the decisive assault that sealed the doom of the enemy. The final victory, analogous to VE-Day, occurs at the final judgment when the Devil is cast into hell. Christians today live between D-Day and VE-Day. During this time, the armies advance against the enemy, slowly but surely, in a bloody and painful battle until Christ has put every last enemy under His feet. Some days see advances while other days see retreats, but overall there is an advance until the last day, the day of the enemy's complete surrender.

*And though this world,
with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.
That word above all earthly powers,
no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.*



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Our Ancient Foe - Cont'd

The fact that we live between the decisive battle and the final battle explains why Peter must still warn his readers that *the Devil prowls around like a lion seeking someone to devour* (1 Peter 5:8). The Devil has suffered a fatal wound, but he is not dead. He remains dangerous, and we must remain watchful against his schemes. He does not always come at us looking as evil as he is. He and his servants can disguise themselves as angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). In spite of this, because we are united with Jesus Christ, the One who crushed his head, we can resist the Devil, and he will flee from us. ~ ***Dr. Keith A. Mathison - Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla***

Knowing Where We Stand: Washington Post Columnist Says Anyone Who Holds to Biblical Morality Is A Bigot—Calls for VP Pence to Resign

Sometimes, in just one public argument, all the worst winds gather together as a perfect storm. Perhaps no article in recent months fits that mold more than an opinion piece that ran just days ago in The Washington Post by veteran columnist Richard Cohen. The headline of the article reads, *“It’s Not Just Northam. Republicans Must Confront the Bigotry of the Pences Too.”*

So we are told in advance that the article will condemn bigotry. The headline itself carries a weighty context—the background of the article flows from the charges levied against the governor of Virginia after embarrassing photographs surfaced that indicate a repetitive pattern of racism. Understandably, the Democratic Party has decided that Northam should resign. But Richard Cohen says that by the same logic, if Governor Northam must go, Vice President Mike Pence must go too. Why? Because both Northam and Pence stand equally guilty of bigotry.

Actually, Cohen seems to argue that the Pences, both the Vice President and his wife, may be guilty of an even more heinous bigotry. Cohen writes, *“If bigotry is repugnant, why not demand the resignation of Vice President Pence for his ugly views on homosexuality? And while they’re at it, why not insist that Pence’s wife Karen resign her position at a school that discriminates against gays and lesbians?”*

Cohen makes a now familiar argument – he creates a moral parallel between the question of racism and anyone who believes that LGBTQ behaviors and relationships are sinful. He equates discrimination based on skin color with the moral agenda of gay rights.

Cohen tries to head off objections to his argument by writing, *“The Pences are deeply religious, and their views on homosexuality are based on their religious convictions. To this I say, so what? The Bible was used to justify slavery. And in my own time, racists cited this or that biblical passage to assert that racial segregation was precisely what God intended.”*

Cohen operates out of a secular, cosmopolitan perspective. In his view, the use of the Bible in modern moral debate is simply out of bounds. Citing the misuse of the Bible to defend American slavery, he argues that Christians are guilty of the same pattern now, but with reference to sexuality. Cohen is right when he alleges that some have used the Bible to defend slavery and segregation.



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Advocates of slavery relied upon a faulty hermeneutic and a wrongful approach to the Scriptures. In Cohen's mind, given the Vice President's beliefs concerning sexuality, he should be seen as disqualified to serve in high office. Cohen boldly says that appeal to religious conviction cannot serve as a haven for bigoted beliefs and behavior—not for racism and not for anti-LGBTQ positions. He just assumes that all right-minded people will agree that any belief that homosexuality is sinful is just another form of bigotry.

The misuse of the Bible on the matters of race in no way nullifies its clarity or its authority for Christians on sexual ethics. Justification for slavery relied upon a few verses, ripped out of their historical, literary, and theological context. But the Scriptures abound with texts, verses, and instructions regarding marriage and sexuality. The Bible presents a unified theme in all 66 books—a theme that declares marriage as an institution created by God that unites one man to one woman. Indeed, in Romans 1, Paul grounds marital and sexual ethics not only in the Old Testament but in the broader scope of creation. The structure of creation testifies to the goodness and orderliness of God's design for humanity as male and female—from birth—and for marriage and the proper expression of sexuality.

But Cohen continues down his fallacious spiral and just declares that anyone who holds to a biblical view of homosexuality is nothing more than a bigot. By his own logic, Cohen has labeled every Orthodox Jew, Roman Catholic, Mormon, and Muslim who holds to the official teachings of their faith to be a bigot. But Cohen made his central attack upon the Pences and conservative evangelicals. How dare they hold to the doctrines and teachings that Christianity has affirmed for over 2,000 years?

In this insidious but extremely revealing article, Cohen does all he can to dismantle the idea that homosexuality could even be imagined as sinful and morally wrong. He proceeds to smear as a bigot anyone who would dare to even think of homosexuality as sinful.

Note clearly that Richard Cohen makes his own moral judgment abundantly clear. He states: *"It is simply wrong to foster a belief that homosexuality and same-sex marriage are immoral."* So Cohen does believe in right and wrong, but measured by his own internal compass and prevailing elite opinion.

Richard Cohen has drawn a line in the sand. He has appointed himself as judge, jury, and executioner. Homosexuality is not wrong, so if you believe that anything in the LGBTQ array is sinful, you are bigoted. As such, you should be exiled from the public square, where there is no place for bigots.

Cohen's article represents the inevitable collision between religious liberty and the newly defined sexual liberties. The cultural Left believes that any moral opposition to homosexuality exudes intolerance and hatred of the highest order. Cultural exile awaits those who will not get in line with modernity's vision of sexuality. Opposition amounts to nothing less than the same hatred and bigoted sensibilities that marked the defenders of slavery. These are, by Cohen's estimation, moral equivalents that must be eradicated.



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Yet, despite all of this, the real issue at stake in this article revolves around objective morality—the truth that morality is fixed, finite, eternally true, and divinely revealed. The real antipathy Cohen directs at the Pences and to conservative Christians centers on our audacity to draw anything from the pages of Holy Scripture. We dare to say, “*God said.*” We dare to believe that God has spoken, that the Bible is his Word, that it bears divine authority and is without error. The secular mind cannot accept the audacious claim to believe that true morality flows from God’s revelation, that God has spoken and established an order to his creation. The secular elites believe that anyone who holds to a biblical morality is a bigot and anyone who believes in divine revelation must be an idiot. In the view of the secular culture, that’s where we stand.

Of course, the perennial question for the church comes down to this: *Will we stand?* ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**
- *President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*

7 Things We Can Learn from the Puritans

Loving the Truth, Hating Sin

The Puritans have many things to offer modern Christians. The *first* is that they shape your mind according to the Bible. They loved the Bible, they lived the Bible, they sang the Bible, they preached the Bible, they read the Bible, they memorized the Bible. They were thinking about the Bible every day. They are Bible-shaped theologians and Bible-shaped preachers.

What is said of Spurgeon could be said of all the Puritans. You could have pricked his vein anywhere and out would’ve flowed bible blood. They just thought that way—that’s who they were. We need more of that focus on the Word of God.

Secondly, they just loved to preach Christ. In every sermon, it’s like they took a flashlight inside the text and tried to find Jesus, pulled him out, set him as a placard in front of you, and talked about his glory and his beauty until you longed for him. They’re very Christocentric.

Thirdly, we can learn from the Puritans how to convict people of sin. Today, we get preachers in the pulpit who say something very convicting and then they say, “*Now congregation, I don’t mean to convict you or anything.*” The Puritans wanted to convict people. Like God did when he came to Adam, found him behind the bush, and called him out. Puritans wanted to call sinners out from behind the bushes where they were hiding and have them stand naked before God. That’s what we want to do so that they need the Lord Jesus Christ. We learn a lot about conviction of sin and about preaching from the Puritans.



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7 Things We Can Learn from the Puritans - Cont'd

Humble and Willing

Fourthly, we also learn a lot from the Puritans about how to cope with affliction. The average Puritan family had nine children. The average family lost four or five of them before they reached adulthood. They were well-acquainted with affliction, and it was sanctified to them. They wrote about it, they preached about it. They knew what it was to handle life's deep troubles.

Fifthly, we also learn from the Puritans how to rebuke our own pride. They hated their own pride. They walked with genuine humility. We need more of that, as well. We need to beat back our pride and serve the Lord humbly and simply, not looking for credit for ourselves, but serving him faithfully with big servant hearts.

Eternally Minded and of Earthly Good

Sixthly, we also learn from the Puritans how to love people. In times of the plague or the big fire through London, it was often non-Puritan ministers that left the city because they were afraid of catching the plague. The Puritans risked their lives. They went right into the bedrooms of their people, ministered to them, stayed until the end, and were faithful to them.

They loved their people. They loved preaching. They loved their God. They loved the things of God. What's sorely needed in evangelicalism today is burning, passionate love for God and for man.

This robust treatment of Reformed experiential preaching explores what experiential preaching is, examines sermons by key preachers in history, and shows how experiential preaching can best be done today.

Finally, the Puritans really teach us how to live for eternity, keeping one eye on eternity all the time, as Richard Baxter said, and the other eye on time. The more we focus on eternity, the more sanctified we will really be in time.

The whole idea "*he's so heavenly, he's for no earthly good*" would have made the Puritans turn in their grave. The more heavenly you are, the more earthly good you'll do because the more you're like Jesus, the more you'll love people, the more you'll be an evangelist, the more you'll spread the gospel, the more you'll go out of your way to live wholly and solely for your precious Redeemer. ~ ***Dr. Joel R. Beeke - President and professor of systematic theology and homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary***



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Honoring God in the Pulpit

If we were to ask the Apostle Paul for advice on how to honor God as preachers, he would say, “*Preach the word*” (2 Timothy 4:2), do not shrink from “*declaring . . . the whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27), and always highlight the central theme: the gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s how Paul summarized his own philosophy of ministry. In 1 Corinthians 2:2, he distills the key to God-honoring preaching in one short sentence: “*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*”

Today’s conventional wisdom might suggest that such a strategy is not sophisticated enough, not appealing enough, and not subtle enough to reach a thoroughly pagan society. But Paul’s life and legacy prove otherwise. In fact, before he first arrived in Corinth, the Apostle and his cohorts had already earned a reputation as “*men who have turned the world upside down*” (Acts 17:6).

That statement proves that Paul’s (and his companions’) gospel preaching was effective. But it wasn’t meant as a compliment. That is what the Jewish leaders in Thessalonica said about Paul—just before they incited a riot. The fact that the church grew quickly and reached to the outer edges of the Roman Empire (and beyond) certainly does not mean that the Apostles found a way to make their message popular. The gospel was no more popular in the first century than it is today. The majority of people rejected and opposed the message—often violently.

The opposition Paul faced in Thessalonica was not unusual or unexpected. Before he arrived in that city, Paul had already met fierce resistance in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (2 Timothy 3:11). In fact, he had been stoned and left for dead in Lystra (Acts 14:19). In Philippi, he was attacked by a mob, stripped, beaten with rods, and jailed (16:22–23).

While the church grew, hostility from the wider community kept pace. Some four years after Paul was run out of Thessalonica, Ephesus responded even more angrily to the gospel (19:29).

What’s significant is that in the face of such opposition, Paul made no effort to adapt his methodology in a way that might mollify his critics or avoid reproach. He was fully aware of the people’s “*felt needs*”: “*Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom*” (1 Corinthians 1:22). But he did not adapt his strategy accordingly: “*We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles*” (v. 23). Whenever he came into a new region, he would immediately go to the local synagogue on the Sabbath and preach Christ. He preached that message boldly and without apology, not to antagonize people, but to glorify God. For Paul, this was “*the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted*” (1 Timothy 1:11). And it was, after all, good news. Nevertheless, it triggered antagonism almost everywhere Paul went.

Despite intense opposition, Paul never downplayed or deviated from the gospel. That’s how to honor God in the pulpit.

Paul did not respond by de-emphasizing the gospel and trying to find a way to win the respect of influential citizens. He used the same strategy in every city. He went from Thessalonica to Berea and preached in the synagogue there (Acts 17:10). When some hooligans followed him from Thessalonica and tried to provoke the citizens of Berea to riot, Paul moved on to Athens (v. 15), where yet again he took the gospel to the synagogue on the Sabbath.



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Honoring God in the Pulpit - Cont'd

He also proclaimed the gospel in the Athenian marketplace during the week (v. 17), stirring both interest and controversy there, too.

Acts 17 goes on to recount how Paul was summoned to speak at the Areopagus—the gathering place of philosophers and intellectuals. It was not because he had won their respect, but practically the opposite: the philosophers thought he would make an amusing diversion (v. 18).

Paul was an educated man, well versed in the philosophies and ancient writings of the Athenians. He was able to quote classic Greek poets. But Paul did not try to wow the Athenians with philosophical arguments or oratory. He began by declaring to them that their religious beliefs were rooted in ignorance. He announced that God commands repentance and will one day judge the world by Christ (vv. 30–31). In other words, Paul preached Christ. He was about to expound the gospel more fully to these Athenian intellectuals, but as soon as he mentioned the resurrection, the response was so much mockery, controversy, and crosstalk that the meeting broke up.

Surely, such a response—by then a predictable pattern in Paul’s ministry—required a revamping of the whole strategy. Right?

Wrong! Paul next went to Corinth, where his strategy remained unchanged. *“He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks”* (Acts 18:4). Did he use different arguments in Corinth? He answers that question definitively when he says he decided to know nothing *“except Jesus Christ and him crucified”* (1 Corinthians 2:1–2). Paul stayed on message. Despite intense opposition, he never downplayed or deviated from the gospel. That’s how to honor God in the pulpit. ~ **Dr. John McArthur**

Awaiting the City of God

Evangelical Christians love America. Some see in her the last hope of creating a Christian nation. But it is not a Christian nation. It is pagan to the core. It is in danger of becoming, if it is not already, the new *“Evil Empire.”* The Mayflower Compact is a museum piece, a relic of a forgotten era. *“In God We Trust”* is now a lie.

Yes, we must always work for social reform. Yes, we must be *“profane”* in Martin Luther’s sense of going out of the temple and into the world. We do not despise the country of our birth. But in what do we invest our hope? The state is not God. The nation is not the Promised Land. The president is not our King. The Congress is not our Savior. Our welfare can never be found in the city of man. The federal government is not sovereign. We live—in every age and in every generation—by the rivers of Babylon. We need to understand that clearly. We must learn how to sing the Lord’s song in a strange and foreign land.

America will fall. The United States will inevitably disintegrate. The Stars and Stripes will bleed. The White House will turn to rubble. That is certain. We stand like Augustine before the sea. We pray that God will spare our nation. If He chooses not to, we ask for the grace to accept its demise. In either case, we look to Him who is our King and to heaven, which is our home. We await the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, whose builder and maker is God. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner - March 2019

Birthdays

Marlow S. (12)
Haddon W. (13)
Rose M. (15)
Les T. (19)
Lydia H. (22)

Daniel K. (23)
Peggy G. (25)
Jonathan F. (26)
Tom S. (29)

Anniversary

Marlow and Wilma S. (15)
Rick and Peggy G. (31)

On February 3rd Marlow and Wilma Slayton became new members at West Suffolk. They are pictured here with our pastor. As part of the membership process all of the church read the church covenant together as a sign of our commitment, dedication and love for one another.



**West Suffolk Baptist Church
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.westsuffolkbcc.com Phone/Fax: 757-539-0363

Teaching Pastor/Elder: Pastor Ben Scofield

Teaching Elders: Scott Thomas and Mike Prince

Deacons: Marlin Halsey, John McPhatter and John Hurst

Editor: Walt Lawrence, gwlcf10415@gmail.com

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.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or its leadership.