



Volume 6 Issue 6

# *West Suffolk Epistle*

## *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

*“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”*



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*Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America*

### *A Charitable Reaction*

Has anyone ever said something unkind to you or about you? I think we all have had that experience. Becoming victims of slander or malicious gossip can be difficult to bear. However, God calls us to exhibit a very specific kind of response in such circumstances.

Years ago, I received a letter from a friend who is a pastor at a church in California. In it, the pastor included a copy of an article that had appeared in the Los Angeles Times. Although the article included a photo of him standing in his church and holding his Bible, it was basically a vicious personal attack against him.

When I saw that picture and read that article, I felt a great deal of empathy for my friend because I had recently had a similar experience. A person I believed was my friend made some very unkind statements about me publicly, and word had gotten back to me. My feelings basically vacillated between despondency and anger, even though I knew I needed to respond with joy (Matthew 5:11–12).

I believe the greatest book ever written about the virtue of love in the Christian life is Jonathan Edwards' classic *Charity and Its Fruits*. In this book, Edwards included a chapter on how we are to respond to false charges. There, he makes the biblical point that such attacks should not surprise us; rather, we should expect them:

*Men that have their spirits heated and enraged and rising in bitter resentment when they are injured act as if they thought some strange thing had happened to them. Whereas they are very foolish in so thinking for it is no strange thing at all but only what was to be expected in a world like this. They therefore do not act wisely that allow their spirits to be ruffled by the injuries they suffer.*

Edwards' point is that if the Christian expects to be slandered and keeps his eyes focused on God when it happens, he will not be depressed over it.

Edwards reinforces the concept that other human beings can harm only my worldly pleasure. A person can injure my body, steal my money, or even destroy my reputation. However, all of these things have to do only with the cares and pleasures of this world. But we have an inheritance that is laid up in heaven, a treasure no one can steal or defile (1 Peter 1:4). It is protected by the Lord Himself.

We might be tempted to think that Edwards was a spiritual giant who could handle personal attacks with ease, while we are “ordinary” believers. How, then, can we not be distressed when we are hurt by people we thought were our friends? Yet while it is true that it is part of our human nature to respond to personal attacks with sadness, anger, or bitterness, these feelings are part of our fallen humanity. They are not fruits of the Holy Spirit. This means that Edwards, as great a saint as he was, was not calling “ordinary” Christians to do anything extraordinary. We are all called to bear our injuries with joy, patience, love, and gentleness.



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### *A Charitable Reaction - Cont'd*

This kind of response is required of all of us because the Christian life is about the imitation of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). We are being molded into His image, so we are to strive to live as He lived. Our Lord was slandered and falsely accused of all kinds of offenses, but He opened not His mouth in protest (Isaiah 53:7). Like a lamb, He accepted these vitriolic attacks, and, in the very moment of His passion, He prayed for the forgiveness of those who were attacking Him (Luke 23:34). This is how we are called to react to our enemies (1 Peter 4:13). Therefore, every false accusation, every slander, every ill word spoken about me is an opportunity for me to grow in my sanctification.

Edwards helped me see that I had allowed my soul to become distressed, and that was sin. Instead of seeing the attack on me as an occasion to imitate Christ and to grow in my sanctification, I had resisted God's Spirit, who had brought this painful event into my life for my edification, that I might remember where my treasure is.

The key to responding to attacks and insults as Christ would is to nurture love for God. Edwards writes:

*As love to God prevails, it tends to set persons above human injuries, in this sense, that the more they love God the more they will place all their happiness in him. They will look to God as their all and seek their happiness in portion in his favor, and thus not in the allotments of his providence alone. The more they love God, the less they set their hearts on their worldly interests, which are all that their enemies can touch.*

We need to keep Edwards' insight in mind as we deal with the inevitable attacks and insults that come our way in this life. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. - January 2013*

### *Progress Redefined*

The world measures success in terms of that which is tangible — by what is bigger, faster, and by what draws the most attention. For many people, success is defined solely by numbers and circumstantial outcomes. True success, however, cannot be measured merely by what is perceived by the eyes of men. We measure our success according to economic and sociological standards, which at times is certainly appropriate considering that we are to be good stewards of our time, talents, and finances; however, the problem lies in that we measure our Christian lives according to the same principles — evaluating our success in the Christian life based on what is bigger, faster, and, especially, on what draws the most attention. However, often what is considered “successful” by the world's standards is entirely unsuccessful according to the standards of God. Though it could be said that the measure of a man in terms of his success is based upon the subjective standards of others, true success is measured objectively by God, whose standard is impartial and immutable.

According to the prophet Micah, God has provided us with His standard of success: “*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God*” (Micah 6:8). Simply stated, God is not first and foremost concerned with our success; rather, He is concerned with our faithfulness. Herein is the standard of the pilgrim's progress: As pilgrims of God, we progress not in our successfulness but in our faithfulness to God. Our standard for faithfulness does not come from the world, it does not come from those around us, and it certainly does not come from within us.



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### *Progress Redefined - Cont'd*

Our standard is from God alone and is found in the cross of Christ alone, and it is upon the cross that Christ took the burden from our backs and set us free to live, move, and have our being in Him.

As we learn from Bunyan's classic, our progress as Christians is not measured on the scale of man's justice but on the scale of God's grace. For His burden is easy and His yoke light, and to walk humbly before God is to be lifted up by God (James 4:10), to know weakness is to know the perfection of God's strength (2 Corinthians 12:9), to bear the cross is to wear the crown (Galatians 6:14), and to live for Christ *coram Deo*, before the face of God, is to die to ourselves (Mark 8:34). ~ *Dr. Burk Parsons - Editor of Tabletalk magazine, senior pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla. - January 2006*

### *The Constancy of a Pilgrim's Life - A Pastor's Perspective*

It has been said that one hallmark of the Puritan view of the Christian life was the emphasis placed on being "*constant*" (or being steady and unchanging). Remember how John Bunyan puts the challenge to us to learn from the life of the pilgrim?

*Who would true valour see, let him come hither; one here will constant be, come wind, come weather. There's no discouragement shall make him once relent his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.*

That is, "*if you want to know how to live a constant Christian life, come take a look at this guy.*"

The Puritans, and certainly Bunyan, highly valued the Bible's accent on faithfully, consistently, tirelessly pursuing the Christian life with a view to the long haul. Key to this is the role of the ordinary means of grace (chief among them the reading/preaching of the Word, the right partaking of the sacraments, the engagement of the soul with God in prayer). If we are to manifest the constancy of the Christian pilgrim's life then we will also place much stock in the ordinary means of grace.

The Word, sacraments, and prayer — these are the ordinances given by God with which spiritual life is nurtured. By "*ordinances*" we mean spiritual instruments of grace and growth in grace appointed by God in the Bible. Here's how the Westminster Assembly explained this in their Shorter Catechism, **Question 88**: "What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption? Answer: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation."

How does one go about living the Christian life? How does one walk in the way of salvation? How does one become a "*constant Christian*?" By a careful use of God's appointed, ordinary and outward means of growth. Again, the assembly of divines gives this helpful summation of the Bible's answer: by "*faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.*" In other words, the constant Christian is strengthened for his pilgrimage by God's grace held out to all who trust in Christ, bestowed and received through the ordinary means set forth in the Word.



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### *The Constancy of a Pilgrim's Life - A Pastor's Perspective— Cont'd*

So, when we say that the Christian pilgrim highly values God's ordinances and faithfully participates in the ordinary means of grace, we mean that the pilgrim believes the things that God says in the Bible are central to the spiritual health and growth of His people, are in fact central in his own Christian life. In other words, if God says in the Bible that the way His people grow is by a diligent use of His ordinary means, a true pilgrim believes God and lives accordingly.

Thus, pilgrims (in order to know and grow in the true knowledge of God, and to keep fast in the way of faithfulness) delight in, highly value, and faithfully attend the public reading and preaching of the Word; mature in their assurance as they contemplate God's saving promises to them each time they see baptism administered and joyfully commune in the Lord's Supper; and engage in a life of prayer, especially expressed corporately in the local church.

This isn't just a Puritan thing though. It is a biblical thing. Throughout the New Testament, God explicitly instructs pastors and churches to do the following things: **First**, "Give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching" (1 Timothy 3:13 NASB); **Second**, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2 NASB); **Third**, "Make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20 NASB); **Fourth**, "This is My body, which is for you.... This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:24–26 NASB); **Fifth**, "I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made.... Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands" (1 Timothy 2:1, 8 NASB).

These are the main ways God's people grow and become constant. We are saved by grace through faith — indeed, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. But the means of God's grace to bring us to faith and grow us in grace are the Word, prayer, and the sacraments. Nothing else we do in the church's program should detract from these central means of grace; indeed, everything else we do should promote and coalesce with them. Nothing else is more important if we are to display the constancy of the pilgrim life.

Walk this way, and you'll be constant, come wind or weather. ~ **Dr. Ligon Duncan - Chancellor of Reformed Theological Seminary and the John E. Richards Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology. - January 2006**



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### *Paul in the Marketplace*

The apostle Paul’s missionary work was never contingent on cultural adjustments. He maintained a singular focus and consistent message throughout his missionary journeys. When provoked by the gross idolatry of Athenian culture, Paul’s response was to do what he had done in virtually every city where he had ever ministered. He went to the synagogue and the marketplace and preached Christ. Acts 17:17 says, “*So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.*” His approach was direct, confrontive evangelism. He did not do a community survey. He did not conduct any special research. He did not try to put together an evangelization committee. He just went to the synagogue and the marketplace and preached to whoever was there.

“*God-fearing Gentiles*” refers to Gentiles who were associated with the synagogue—people who knew about Jehovah God and believed enough about Him to fear Him. So Paul was ministering to Jews, God-fearing Gentiles, and rank pagans. There was no marketing focus or target group. Paul proclaimed the truth everywhere to everyone, just as he had done all over Asia Minor.

The marketplace in Athens was called the agora. It was the hub of all activity for Athens. Situated at the southern edge of the ancient city, it stood in the shadow of the hill called Areopagus. Looming to the southeast was the great Acropolis, the geographical high point of Athens, where the most spectacular temples were situated—including the massive Parthenon, a magnificent marble structure that was already five hundred years old by the time Paul saw it.

The agora was a large courtyard in the midst of all the civic buildings. There, under a large colonnade, people would set up little shops and booths. Vendors would peddle their wares. Farmers brought produce and cattle to sell. Tradesmen would be there to ply their services. It was always a busy place. A modern equivalent might be a town square or the central area of a city mall. In the middle of the marketplace, philosophers would congregate and vie with one another for people’s attention. Peripatetic teachers in the tradition of Aristotle, specialists in the healing arts, magicians, hucksters, and street performers of all kinds had a forum where they could work the crowds.

Paul saw it as an ideal place to preach. Scripture says he reasoned there “*every day with those who happened to be present.*” What form did his discourse take? Verse 18 says he preached the gospel. He was preaching about “Jesus and the resurrection”—classic Pauline ministry.

How could one man hope to have an effect on a city like Athens? From a human perspective Paul stood literally alone against centuries of traditional paganism—and intellectual paganism at that. What could he hope to accomplish by standing in the marketplace and preaching about Jesus and the resurrection?

Those are questions a marketing specialist might have asked, but not Paul. He didn’t see himself as one man alone against a city. He saw himself as a voice through which the power of God—the gospel—could be loosed on the largest and most influential metropolis in that part of the world. He believed that by standing there in the agora proclaiming Christ he was unleashing God’s own power on the city of Athens. The impact of it was in God’s hands. ~ *Blog Post by Dr. John McArthur - May 20, 2019*



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### *The Fall of a Believer*

We may live in a culture that believes everyone will be saved, that we are “*justified by death*” and all you need to do to go to heaven is die, but God’s Word certainly doesn’t give us the luxury of believing that. Any quick and honest reading of the New Testament shows that the Apostles were convinced that nobody can go to heaven unless they believe in Christ alone for their salvation (John 14:6; Romans 10:9–10).

Historically, evangelical Christians have largely agreed on this point. Where they have differed has been on the matter of the security of salvation. People who would otherwise agree that only those who trust in Jesus will be saved have disagreed on whether anyone who truly believes in Christ can lose his salvation.

Theologically speaking, what we are talking about here is the concept of apostasy. This term comes from a Greek word that means “*to stand away from.*” When we talk about those who have become apostate or have committed apostasy, we’re talking about those who have fallen from the faith or at least from the profession of faith in Christ that they once made.

Many believers have held that yes, true Christians can lose their salvation because there are several New Testament texts that seem to indicate that this can happen. I’m thinking, for example, of Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 1:18–20:

*This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

Here, in the midst of instructions and admonitions related to Timothy’s life and ministry, Paul warns Timothy to keep the faith and to keep a good conscience, and to be reminded of those who didn’t. The Apostle refers to those who made “*shipwreck of their faith,*” men whom he “*handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.*” This second point is a reference to Paul’s excommunication of these men, and the whole passage combines a sober warning with concrete examples of those who fell away grievously from their Christian profession.

There is no question that professing believers can fall and fall radically. We think of men like Peter, for example, who denied Christ. But the fact that he was restored shows that not every professing believer who falls has fallen past the point of no return. At this point, we should distinguish a serious and radical fall from a total and final fall. Reformed theologians have noted that the Bible is full of examples of true believers who fall into gross sin and even protracted periods of impenitence. So, Christians do fall and they fall radically. What could be more serious than Peter’s public denial of Jesus Christ?

But the question is, are these people who are guilty of a real fall irretrievably fallen and eternally lost, or is this fall a temporary condition that will, in the final analysis, be remedied by their restoration? In the case of a person such as Peter, we see that his fall was remedied by his repentance. However, what about those who fall away finally? Were they ever truly believers in the first place?



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### *The Fall of a Believer - Cont'd*

Our answer to this question has to be no. First John 2:19 speaks of the false teachers who went out from the church as never having truly been part of the church. John describes the apostasy of people who had made a profession of faith but who never really were converted. Moreover, we know that God glorifies all whom He justifies (Romans 8:29–30). If a person has true saving faith and is justified, God will preserve that person.

In the meantime, however, if the person who has fallen is still alive, how do we know if he is a full apostate? One thing none of us can do is read the heart of other people. When I see a person who has made a profession of faith and later repudiates it, I don't know whether he is a truly regenerate person who's in the midst of a serious, radical fall but who will at some point in the future certainly be restored; or whether he is a person who was never really converted, whose profession of faith was false from the start.

This question of whether a person can lose his salvation is not an abstract question. It touches us at the very core of our Christian lives, not only with regard to our concerns for our own perseverance, but also with regard to our concern for our family and friends, particularly those who seemed, for all outward appearances, to have made a genuine profession of faith. We thought their profession was credible, we embraced them as brothers or sisters, only to find out that they repudiated that faith.

What do you do, practically, in a situation like that? First, you pray, and then, you wait. We don't know the final outcome of the situation, and I'm sure there are going to be surprises when we get to heaven. We're going to be surprised to see people there who we didn't think would be, and we're going to be surprised that we don't see people there who we were sure would be there, because we simply don't know the internal status of a human heart or of a human soul. Only God can see that soul, change that soul, and preserve that soul. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.** - April 2014

### *The Poor became Rich (Mark 10:46—52)*

A large crowd of Passover pilgrims followed Jesus and His disciples to Jericho, about eighteen miles from Jerusalem. There were actually two cities named Jericho: the old city in ruins, and the new city a mile away where Herod the Great and his successors built a lavish winter palace. This may help explain the seeming contradiction between Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35.

There were two blind beggars sitting by the road (Matthew 20:30), one of whom was named Bartimaeus. Both Mark and Luke focused attention on him since he was the more vocal of the two. The beggars heard that Jesus of Nazareth, the Healer, was passing by; they did their best to get His attention so that they might receive His merciful help and be healed.

At first, the crowd tried to silence them, but when Jesus stopped and called for the men, the crowd encouraged them! Desperate people do not permit the crowd to keep them from Jesus (see Mark 5:25–34). Bartimaeus threw off his garment so it would not trip him, and he hastened to the Master. No doubt some of the pilgrims or disciples helped him.

“What do you want Me to do for you?” seems like a strange question to ask a blind man. (It was the same question He had asked James, John, and Salome, Mark 10:36.) But Jesus wanted to give the man opportunity to express himself and give evidence of his own faith. What did he really believe Jesus could do for him?



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### *The Poor became Rich (Mark 10:46—52) - Cont'd*

When Bartimaeus called Jesus “Lord,” he used the title Rabboni, meaning “my Master.” The only other person in the Gospels who used it was Mary (John 20:16). The beggar had twice called him “Son of David,” a national messianic title, but “Rabboni” was an expression of personal faith.

Matthew tells us that Jesus was moved with compassion and touched their eyes (Matthew 20:34), and immediately they were healed. Out of gratitude to Jesus, the men joined the pilgrim band and started toward Jerusalem, following Jesus. This is the last healing miracle recorded in Mark, and it certainly fits into Mark’s “Servant” theme. We see Jesus Christ, God’s Suffering Servant, on His way to the cross, and yet He stops to serve two blind beggars! What love, what mercy, and what grace! ~ *The Bible Exposition Commentary*

### *Learning from Judas (Judas Iscariot)*

The twelve apostles included "Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him" (Matthew 10:4).

#### **God can use even an apostate like Judas to teach us some important lessons**

Judas is history's greatest human tragedy. He had opportunities and privileges known only to the other disciples, but he turned from them to pursue a course of destruction. Yet even from his foolishness we can learn some important lessons.

Judas, for example, is the world's greatest example of lost opportunity. He ministered for three years with Jesus Himself but was content merely to associate with Him, never submitting to Him in saving faith. Millions of others have followed his example by hearing the gospel and associating with Christians, yet rejecting Christ. Tragically, like Judas, once death comes they too are damned for all eternity.

Judas is also the world's greatest example of wasted privileges. He could have had the riches of an eternal inheritance but instead chose thirty pieces of silver. In that respect he is also the greatest illustration of the destructiveness and damnation greed can bring. He did an unthinkable thing, yet he has many contemporary counterparts in those who place wealth and pleasure above godliness.

On the positive side, Judas is the world's greatest illustration of the forbearing, patient love of God. Knowing what Judas would do, Jesus tolerated him for three years. Beyond that, He constantly reached out to him and even called him "friend" after his kiss of betrayal (Matt. 26:50).

If you've ever been betrayed by a friend, you know the pain it can bring. But the Lord's pain was compounded many times over because He knew He would be betrayed and because the consequences were so serious. Yet He endured the pain because He loved Judas and knew that His own betrayal was a necessary part of the redemptive plan.

The sins that destroyed Judas are common sins that you must avoid at all costs! Use every opportunity and privilege God gives you, and never take advantage of His patience. ~ *Dr. John McArthur*





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## *Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner - June 2019*

### *Birthdays*

*Gene A. (6)  
Mike P. (27)*

### *Anniversary*

*Brian and Muriel R. (7)  
Ben and Carrie P. (23)  
Scott and Ruth T. (25)*

## *Tracing the Genealogy of Jesus*

At first glance, the beginning of Matthew is a less-than-exciting literary starting point of the New Testament. It is a list of “begats” tracing Jesus’ lineage back to Abraham.

What this beginning lacks in literary punch it makes up for in theological significance. Among other things, the genealogical tables of the New Testament place the gospel squarely on the plane of history. Jesus was born “in the fullness of time”—His ministry is defined and interpreted against the background of Old Testament history.

The New Testament provides two genealogical tables for Jesus, one by Matthew and one by Luke. These tables differ at significant points. Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience and Luke for a Gentile audience. Matthew was concerned to show that Jesus legally descended from David and was therefore a descendant of Judah to whom the messianic kingship was promised. Matthew treats the legal descent of Jesus and limits the lists to three groupings of fourteen generations, allowing himself to make omissions.

Luke follows the natural descent with greater detail. He takes the list back to Adam, as it was a central theme in his Gospel to set forth the universality of the gospel. Jesus is indeed the Son of Abraham and the Son of David, but He is also the new Adam who comes to redeem not only Israel but men and women from every tribe and nation.



**West Suffolk Baptist Church  
Leadership**

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