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West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

The Centerpiece of God's Saving Purpose in the Universe

The doctrines of grace are a cohesive system of theology in which the sovereignty of God is clearly displayed in the salvation of elect sinners. Not only is God acknowledged to reign over all of human history, both micro and macro, but He is also seen to be sovereign in the dispensing of His saving grace. From Genesis to Revelation, God is emphatically represented in Scripture as being absolutely determinative in bestowing His mercy. He is shown as choosing before the foundation of the world those whom He will save and then, within time, bringing it to pass.

The Apostle Paul clearly announced God's sovereign grace in man's salvation. He wrote that, from eternity, God chose, willed, decided, and planned to save some sinners. To elect is to choose, and God chose who would be saved. Paul wrote: *"For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy"* (Romans 9:15–16). *"This is to say, God decides whom He will save in order to display His glory: 'He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will'"* (Ephesians 1:4–5); *"For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you"* (1 Thessalonians 1:4); *"God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth"* (2 Thessalonians 2:13); God *"saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began"* (2 Timothy 1:9); and *"Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect"* (Titus 1:1).

The Apostle Peter and John taught precisely the same supreme authority of God in the salvation of His elect. Peter wrote: *"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia"* (1 Peter 1:1); and *"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure"* (2 Peter 1:10). The Apostle John wrote: *"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come"* (Revelations 17:8).

In this system of theology, the glory of God is central. As every planet revolves around the blazing sun, every truth of sovereign grace rotates around this one fixed point—the glory of God. The unrivaled pre-eminence of God stands at the focal point of this theological universe. That God is to be the chief object of praise in the display of His grace is what energizes this solar system of truth. As the compass always points north, so the doctrines of grace constantly point upward toward the lofty heights of the glory of God.

What is God's glory? The Bible speaks of God's glory in two primary ways. **First**, there is the intrinsic glory of God, which is the sum total of all His divine perfections and attributes. It is who God is—His infinitely vast greatness. Glory in the Old Testament *kabod* originally meant "heaviness," "importance," or "significance." It came to represent the stunning magnificence of certain objects, such as the blazing sun or the regal majesty displayed by a king. Hence, glory came to be used to describe the magnificent splendor and awesome radiance of God Himself revealed to man.



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The Centerpiece of God's Saving Purpose in the Universe - Cont'd

In the New Testament, the word for “glory” is *doxa*, which means “an opinion” or “an estimate” of something. When used of someone’s reputation, it means “importance,” “greatness,” “renown,” or “significance.” God’s intrinsic glory is the revelation of the greatness of His divine attributes to His creatures. It involves God’s greatness and grandeur being manifested to sinners, especially in the salvation of man from sin. No one can add anything to God’s intrinsic glory. God is who He is, never diminishing, never increasing, forever the same, the sovereign Ruler, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present, all-true, allwise, loving, grace-giving, merciful, righteous, and wrathful. It is this intrinsic glory that God delights in making known to His creatures.

Second, the Bible also speaks of the ascribed glory of God, or the glory that is given to Him. *Doxa* also has to do with expressing praise to God based upon the revelation of His supreme majesty. The only rightful response to the display of God’s perfections must be to give Him glory. Man must bring the praise due His name. Man must give the worship that belongs exclusively to Him. The display of God’s intrinsic glory causes man to give ascribed glory to God. The more man beholds God’s intrinsic glory in salvation, the more man ascribes glory to God.

This, then, is the centerpiece of God’s saving purpose in the universe—the revelation and magnification of His own glory. This is what is at the very center of God’s being—the passionate pursuit of displaying His own glory for His own glory. This is what should be at the center of every human life—the promotion of the glory of God, that is, beholding and adoring His glory. This is what is primary in the salvation of every lost sinner—the revealing of the glory of God so that sinners might rejoice in the glory of God. No wonder Paul writes: “*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen*” (Romans 11:36). ~
Dr. Steven J. Lawson

Preach the Word

Every season of reformation and every hour of spiritual awakening has been ushered in by a recovery of biblical preaching. This cause and effect is timeless and inseparable. J.H. Merle D’Aubigné, noted Reformation historian, writes, “*The only true reformation is that which emanates from the Word of God.*” That is to say, as the pulpit goes, so goes the church.

Such was the case in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other reformers were raised up by God to lead this era. At the forefront, it was their recovery of expository preaching that helped launch this religious movement that turned Europe and, eventually, Western civilization upside down. With *sola Scriptura* as their battle cry, a new generation of biblical preachers restored the pulpit to its former glory and revived apostolic Christianity.

The same was true in the golden era of the puritans in the seventeenth century. A recovery of biblical preaching spread like wildfire through the dry religion of Scotland and England. A resurgence of authentic Christianity came as an army of biblical expositors—John Owen, Jeremiah Burroughs, Samuel Rutherford, and others—marched upon the British Empire with an open Bible and uplifted voice. In its wake, the monarchy was shaken and history was altered.



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Preach the Word - Cont'd

The eighteenth century witnessed exactly the same. The Bible-saturated preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and the Tennents thundered through the early colonies. The Atlantic seaboard was electrified with the proclamation of the gospel, and New England was taken by storm. The Word was preached, souls were saved, and the kingdom expanded.

The fact is, the restoration of biblical preaching has always been the leading factor in any revival of genuine Christianity. Philip Schaff writes, *“Every true progress in church history is conditioned by a new and deeper study of the Scriptures.”* That is to say, every great revival in the church has been ushered in by a return to expository preaching.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, preacher of Westminster Chapel London, stated, *“The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the Church, it is the greatest need of the world also.”* If the doctor’s diagnosis is correct, and this writer believes it is, then a return to true preaching—biblical preaching, expository preaching—is the greatest need in this critical hour. If a reformation is to come to the church, it must begin in the pulpit.

In his day, the prophet Amos warned of an approaching famine, a deadly drought that would cover the land. But not an absence of mere food or water, for this scarcity would be far more fatal. It would be a famine for hearing God’s Word (Amos 8:11). Surely, the church today finds itself in such similar days of shortage. Tragically, exposition is being replaced with entertainment, doctrine with drama, theology with theatrics, and preaching with performances. What is so desperately needed today is for pastors to return to their highest calling—the divine summons to “preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:1–2).

What is expository preaching? The Genevan reformer John Calvin explained, *“Preaching is the public exposition of Scripture by the man sent from God, in which God Himself is present in judgment and in grace.”* In other words, God is unusually present, by His Spirit, in the preaching of His Word. Such preaching starts in a biblical text, stays in it, and shows its God-intended meaning in a life-changing fashion.

This was the final charge of Paul to young Timothy: *“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching”* (2 Timothy 4:2). Such preaching necessitates declaring the full counsel of God in Scripture. The entire written Word must be expounded. No truth should be left untaught, no sin unexposed, no grace unoffered, no promise undelivered.

A heaven-sent revival will only come when Scripture is enthroned once again in the pulpit. There must be the clarion declaration of the Bible, the kind of preaching that gives a clear explanation of a biblical text with compelling application, exhortation, and appeal.

Every preacher must confine himself to the truths of Scripture. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. The man of God has nothing to say apart from the Bible. He must not parade his personal opinions in the pulpit. Nor may he expound worldly philosophies. The preacher is limited to one task—preach the Word.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, *“I would rather speak five words out of this book than 50,000 words of the philosophers. If we want revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God. If we want conversions, we must put more of God’s Word into our sermons.”* This remains the crying need of the hour. As the pulpit goes, so does the church. ~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson**



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Passing Down the Truth of God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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Passing Down the Truth of God - Cont'd

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Religion of Secularism

"In God we trust" officially became the national motto of the United States in 1956 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed it into law. Originally implemented in part to distinguish the United States from the Soviet Union and its explicit state atheism, the motto has remained to our day. Like many mottoes, however, the phrase has unfortunately become more of a throwaway statement for many Americans than a declaration of true faith in the one and only God of Scripture.

It is indeed our hope that our nation—and every nation—would genuinely trust God. Although many people claim to trust God, they act as if He has no authority whatsoever over their lives. They are an authority unto themselves, and the foundation for their self-appointed authority is as unstable as the emotions of their ever-changing hearts.



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The Religion of Secularism - Cont'd

Whether or not they know it, they have succumbed to secularism, which begins in the heart and ends in death. Secularism is the belief that man does not need God or God's laws in man's social, governmental, educational, or economic affairs. Ironically, secularism rejects religion, yet is itself a religion. In these United States of America, many of our politicians, courts, schools, and businesses embrace and promote the religion of secularism under the rubric of freedom from religion and by the advancement of human autonomy, which inevitably leads to anarchy.

It's bad enough that secularism is a growing problem in our culture, yet it's even worse that it's making inroads in the church. Worship is often shaped by the felt needs and wants of secularized people. Many pastors will not preach on hell for fear of scaring people away. Some of our most popular religious leaders do little more than take self-help messages and dress them up with a veneer of Christianity. Even some preachers have embraced secularism's teaching that we define our own reality. Thus, they are happy to redefine gender, marriage, and a host of other divinely revealed institutions and norms.

Secularism is not only a problem out there in the culture, it is something we must fight in our hearts, our homes, and our churches. We are too easily tempted to forget God and to avoid conflict with the world. It sometimes seems easier to live as if God really isn't there, to go about our days without reflecting on His authority and that we're called to live all of life *coram Deo*, before the face of God. But if we forget Him, we'll forget who we are. We are His people, and we are called to stand firm against the creeping darkness of secularism, declaring to our hearts, our homes, our churches, and our nation that the Lord God Almighty has authority over all and that, unwaveringly, in God we trust. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons - Senior pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., chief publishing officer for Ligonier Ministries, editor of Tabletalk magazine, and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow.**

Taking Your Faith to the Marketplace

I have seen extraordinary examples of laypeople who have taken their faith to the marketplace in the form of ministry.

Charles Colson went from the White House to prison. When he was released from prison, he was not released from ministry. Indeed, from his experience grew a vision to minister to prison inmates in the name of Christ, a ministry that now reaches tens of thousands of people in virtually every country.

Wayne Alderson, a layman, put his faith to work in the violent arena of labor-management relations. He has taken that ministry around this nation ministering to people in corporate boardrooms, coal mines, and labor union halls.

The list could easily include a multitude of ministries that involve the laity. Without the laity, the church would not have conquered the ancient world. The Reformers understood that for real reformation to happen, the laity had to be educated, trained, and mobilized. Martin Luther took a leave of absence from the university in order to translate the Bible into German—so that every believer could personally read the Scriptures.

John Calvin's Institutes was originally penned as an instruction manual for the laity. Many of the works of Jonathan Edwards were originally composed for the benefit of his congregation, many of whom were known to be studying their Greek New Testaments while they were plowing their fields. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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The "Age of Accountability"

I think the best way to answer that is to say this: There is no "age of accountability" identified in Scripture, as such. There is nothing in the Bible that says, "Here is the *age* and from here on you are responsible!" I think the reason for that is because children mature at different paces. That would be true from culture to culture, and from age to age in history.

So the Lord in His wisdom didn't identify a specific moment. God knows when each soul is accountable. God knows when real rejection has taken place; when the love of sin exists in the heart. When enmity with God is conscious and willful. God alone knows when that occurs.

The Jews had identified about the age of twelve, and that was when Jesus was taken by His parents to Jerusalem for the Passover and the Feast, and there He was in the temple questioning the doctors. You have a good illustration there, and Jesus was asking profound questions at that point. This then seems to be the age when those kinds of questions begin to be personal in the heart of a child.

So I have always felt that somewhere around age twelve, the transition from childhood to adulthood takes place. It's probably not totally disassociated from puberty, where there is a consciousness of one's own impulses, feelings, drives, desires, and therefore sinful attitudes and passions, and whatever else starts to emerge.

With this in mind, I believe that it is absolutely essential, all along the way with children, that every time they desire to make a commitment to Jesus Christ, at whatever age, you (as someone giving spiritual oversight to them) encourage them to do that. Because you don't know, we can't know, when their desire is indicative of genuine saving faith. When a young child says, "I want to invite Christ into my life," then you need to encourage them to do that. Every one of those, I see as a step towards God. At what point that becomes saving faith -- only God knows for certain.

But, I also believe, that up until that point of real saving faith, God in His mercy, would save that child, should that child die. I have been doing some study on that very issue, because when I was at a conference recently, and that question was asked of a panel of very astute theologians -- no one gave an adequate answer. And I thought, "How can we have theologians who don't know the answer to that question? What about the children before the age of accountability, when they die, do they go to heaven?" I think the answer is "yes," and I think it is a strong "YES," based upon the confidence of David who said, when his little baby died: "He cannot come to me, but I shall go to him." And David knew where he was going; David knew he was going to heaven -- he knew that. There wasn't any question in his mind about that.

So when he said, "I shall go to him," in those words was the anticipation and the joyful hope of reunion. Now, some people have said, "Well, all he meant was, 'I am going to be buried next to him.'" There wouldn't be any reason to say, "He can't come to me, but, oh I'm so glad I am going to be buried next to him!" There would be no joy in that; that wouldn't satisfy anything. So I think at that point, he was expressing the confidence that he was going to heaven; he knew that was where he would find his son, who had died before the age of accountability.

Another interesting thing that occurs numerous times in the Old Testament, is that children (including those who die) are referred to as "innocent." The Hebrew word that is used for "innocent" is used numerous times in the Old Testament to refer to "not being guilty" -- literally, "being taken to court and found 'not guilty.'" In fact, the OT refers to the babies that were passed through the fire to Moloch [false god] as the "innocents," so I believe that God, prior to the "age of accountability" treats them as "innocent." It doesn't mean that they are not fallen; it doesn't mean that they are not sinful -- it does mean that God mercifully treats them as "innocent" in spite of that, and He has to exercise grace to do that, just as He exercises grace to save those who believe.

In summary, the "age of accountability" is not clearly identified in Scripture. I think it's up to parents; every time a child wants to respond and open the heart to Christ -- you need to encourage that, all the way along, until they come to that point where it is genuine, and the Lord knows that even if you don't. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner - March 2020

Birthdays

Kaitlynn C. (6) *Lydia H. (22)*
Marlow S. (12) *Daniel K. (23)*
Haddon W. (13) *Peggy G. (25)*
Rose M. (15) *Jonathan F. (26)*
Les T. (19) *Tom S. (29)*

Anniversary

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

The Mercy and Sovereignty of God

“When we understand the character of God, when we grasp something of His holiness, then we begin to understand the radical character of our sin and hopelessness. Helpless sinners can survive only by grace. Our strength is futile in itself; we are spiritually impotent without the assistance of a merciful God. We may dislike giving our attention to God's wrath and justice, but until we incline ourselves to these aspects of God's nature, we will never appreciate what has been wrought for us by grace. Even Edwards's sermon on sinners in God's hands was not designed to stress the flames of hell. The resounding accent falls not on the fiery pit but on the hands of the God who holds us and rescues us from it. The hands of God are gracious hands. They alone have the power to rescue us from certain destruction.”

“God’s grace is not infinite. God is infinite, and God is gracious. We experience the grace of an infinite God, but grace is not infinite. God sets limits to His patience and forbearance. He warns us over and over again that someday the ax will fall and His judgment will be poured out.” ~ *R.C. Sproul, The Holiness 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.

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