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West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Created to Rule

The human race was designed to rule and was given authority to exercise dominion over the rest of creation. Evolutionary chance didn't smile upon us, nor did we have to fight our way to the top of the food chain. Adam's mandate to rule and subdue the earth came directly from God.

Immediately after saying *"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"* (Genesis 1:26), God told Adam and Eve to *"be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth"* (Genesis 1:28). Man was intended by God to be the sovereign of the planet. He was literally instructed to subdue the planet, take dominion, and rule over everything God had placed on earth.

Of course this speaks collectively of the whole human race—not just Adam. This is made clear by the plural pronoun in verse 26: *"Let them have dominion"* (NKJV). The scope of humanity's dominion over the earth was very broad, too. And it was to include every living creature. God's mandate to Adam expressly listed the creatures in the order of their creation: *"the fish of the sea . . . the birds of the sky . . . the cattle . . . [and] every creeping thing"* (Genesis 1:26).

The first step of this dominion involved something very practical. Genesis 2:19 records this: *"Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name."* That was Adam's first task. He had to look at the characteristics of each creature and give it a fitting name.

Man was made in God's image, so it was appropriate that God would delegate to man something of His own sovereign prerogative. Notice that God Himself had already named day and night (Genesis 1:5), heaven (Genesis 1:8), and the earth and the seas (Genesis 1:10). It is the Creator's privilege to name what He creates, but in this case He delegated that task to Adam. It became Adam's first duty as ruler of the world.

Another responsibility was assigned to Adam. He was made the gardener in Eden. Genesis 2:15 says *"Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it."* Of course, this task was given to him before he fell into sin. That means there was no curse yet, so there were no weeds, and the environment was perfect. This was an easy and pleasant assignment for Adam. No doubt it was a source of great joy. And it was the only work he was given to do—if such an occupation can even be called *"work"* in a sweatless, weedless, curse-free environment. The garden was filled with every kind of fruit tree God had made. Water for the garden was readily available from a river that ran through it. And Adam's only responsibility was to make sure that the trees and plants in this perfect environment had appropriate care. It was the most pleasant vocation any person could ever have.

Adam's responsibility to subdue the earth and rule over it was perfectly complemented by his duty to tend the garden. In Douglas F. Kelly's words:



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The call to tend the garden and classify the animals provides a fine and fruitful balance in the relationship of mankind to the environment which God has placed under his derived authority. This healthy balance is not to be found outside the biblical faith. Eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, for instance, tend to neglect developing “*the garden*” (viewing it as a sort of God, not to be tampered with), as do some forms of Christian mysticism; materialist, technological industrialism tends to destroy “*the garden*” for short-sighted economic purposes, whether in the strip mines of West Virginia, the slag heaps of the English Midlands, or the dead rivers of Romania; and the ultra-environmentalists or “*Greens*” tend to elevate it above the legitimate needs and purposes of human society, thus losing their own significance and failing to bring to fruition what man could accomplish with the remarkable capacities of the created order. But the dominion of Genesis teaches man both to respect and to subdue nature, so as to shape it in a direction that will reflect the beauty, order and glory of its Creator.

So Adam was given both dominion over God’s creation and the responsibility to care for it.

Unfortunately, when he fell, Adam abdicated some of his God-given authority. When he yielded to Satan, he forfeited the absolute dominion God had given him over the earth. It is interesting that Jesus repeatedly referred to Satan as “*the ruler of this world*” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). That was supposed to be man’s role. But Adam’s willful sin in effect forfeited dominion to the devil.

Christ Himself will return to regain that dominion and establish Himself as the ruler of this world. He has already defeated the powers of evil at the cross: “*When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him*” (Colossians 2:15). And upon His return to earth, He will receive His kingdom and establish it worldwide, reigning on an earthly throne in His glorified human body. And thus in the person of Christ, humanity will finally have the full dominion God planned from the start—and more. Hebrews 2:8 celebrates this certainty: “*You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him.*”

The writer of Hebrews continues, “*But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.*” We still live in a world that is under the curse of sin, so we cannot subdue the garden of God as we would like. Weeds, pests, harmful bacteria, harmful viruses, and other effects of the Curse—not to mention fallen human nature—keep the task of subduing the earth constantly out of reach. It is ironic that man was originally given dominion over all of creation, and yet in his fallen state, even the tiniest microbes can bring him low.

And yet fallen humanity has managed to take dominion over creation to an amazing degree, devising technology that allows us to cultivate only a fraction of the earth’s potential farmland and still grow enough crops to feed the world. Technology has permitted us to travel to the moon, develop amazing communications networks, travel across vast continents by air in a few hours, build dams to create large reservoirs, devise power systems that harness the energy in the universe to humanity’s benefit, and develop medical technology that prolongs life. Even in his fallen state, the human being is a wonderful creature, still endowed with the image of his maker.



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But we do not yet see all things subjected to man. There is still war and disease and poverty. Most of the technology humanity has developed has created new problems while attempting to solve old ones. Man sometimes has a destructive effect on his own environment. Above all, man is unable to subdue his own sinful tendencies.

Christ, the perfect man, will do what fallen man has been unable to do. He will destroy all the works of the devil (1 John 3:8)—and even destroy the devil himself (Hebrews 2:14). That victory was already sealed when Christ rose from the dead. We are now simply awaiting its culmination. And that will occur at the end of the age.

Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. (1 Corinthians 15:24–27)

Scripture says the redeemed will reign with Christ in an earthly kingdom for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). The earth will be restored as a paradise. Major elements of the Curse will be reversed. *“The wilderness and the desert will be glad, and the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it will blossom profusely and rejoice”* (Isaiah 35:1–2). The animals will revert to their pre-Fall state, so that none will be carnivorous, and even the most fearsome predators will pose no danger to humanity or to other species (Isaiah 11:6–9).

Even sin and death will be mitigated in the millennial kingdom.

No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought accursed. (Isaiah 65:20)

In other words, infant mortality will be eliminated and life expectancy greatly extended. (It seems reasonable to think that many who enter into the kingdom alive might survive through the entire millennium.) Since those born in the earthly kingdom do inherit a sin nature, the effects of sin will not be entirely erased. Most people, it appears, will be redeemed. But those who persist in sin and unbelief will be judged with death. And humanity’s normal life expectancy will be such that if someone dies at one hundred years old (because of willful sin and persistent unbelief), he will be regarded as someone who died tragically young—as if he died in childhood.

During that millennial kingdom, humanity will finally get a taste of what life in Eden could have been. With Christ reigning and the effects of sin mitigated, earthly life will be as close to paradise as a world tainted with sin could ever know.

And finally, when the millennial kingdom is complete, the heavens and earth will pass away and be replaced by a new creation (Revelation 21:1). That world, untainted with sin or sorrow of any kind, will even surpass Eden in its delights. And a man—the man Christ Jesus—will have dominion over it, with His saints finally sharing the perfect dominion man was originally created to enjoy. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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The Universal Guilty Verdict

In Romans 3:9–18, Paul gives the following summary of his long opening discourse (Romans 1:18–3:8), in which he says all of humanity—every tribe, tongue, and nation—stands guilty before God:

What then? Are we [Jews] better than they [the Gentiles]? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; As it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Although virtually all people like to think of themselves as basically good, the testimony of God’s Word is precisely the opposite. Scripture states unequivocally that the entire human race is evil. In the vernacular of our times, humanity is bad to the bone—corrupt to the core. To put it in familiar theological terms, we are totally depraved.

We are naturally, intuitively, painfully aware of our guilt too. A ubiquitous sense of shame goes with being a fallen creature. It’s what made Adam and Eve try to mask their nakedness with leaves. That’s a perfect metaphor for the futile ways people try to paper over the shame of their wickedness. They don’t want to face it. They try to eliminate that sense of guilt by adopting a more convenient kind of morality, or by silencing their crying conscience.

The culture all around us is loaded with encouragements and incentives for people to indulge their favorite sins, ignore their own culpability, deny their guilt, and silence their conscience. In fact, a strong sense of guilt is popularly regarded as a mental-health defect. Seeing oneself fundamentally as a victim is much easier, and certainly more gratifying, than facing the reality of sin. WebMD.com, the premier online source offering simple medical advice to laypeople, features an article titled “Learning to Forgive Yourself” that includes this quote from a clinical trainer at a rehab center: “People do things—intended or not—that hurt others. You may not intend to harm, but the other person is no less hurt.” Now, you might think the article would go on to encourage the offender to seek forgiveness from the person who he or she offended, even if the offense was unintentional. Not so. The very next sentence says, “That’s when you need to stop at some point and forgive yourself.”

That’s very bad advice. That attitude toward guilt has created a society full of people convinced they are purely victims, not malefactors. They won’t hear of their own culpability, much less confess it; therefore they cannot hear the good news of the gospel, much less believe it.

Admittedly, we don’t like the dishonor that our sin inevitably brings us. Naturally, we want to be free from the weight of our guilt. But suppressing guilt and denying our sinfulness is not the answer to our sin problem. That is Paul’s point in Romans 1:18, before his discussion of sin really gets started: To “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” is to incur the wrath of God.



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Living under the frown of God's wrath, under the reality of His condemnation, and under threat of eternal judgment is frightfully worse than facing our guilt. However miserable life in this world may seem because of guilt and shame, life in the next world will be infinitely more miserable for those who have to face God's endless judgment.

Those are inevitable fruits of sin: misery in this life, and eternal, unimaginable misery in the life to come. People try to squelch their earthly despondency by artificial means such as frivolous diversions, the pursuit of pleasure, alcohol, drugs, or ultimately even suicide. But if those who give themselves over to such things manage to retain any semblance of sanity, the guilt will persist anyway, because, according to Romans 2:15, the basics of God's moral law have been inscribed on our hearts by God Himself. Romans 2:15 also says the human conscience bears witness to that law. So whether the thoughts of our minds accuse or excuse us, the conscience bears witness to our guilt. No matter how hard we try to suppress, muffle, or shout down the voice of conscience, in the end, Paul says, "God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus" (Romans 2:16).

It is a universal dilemma. The whole world is guilty before God (Romans 3:19). And Paul is meticulous in making that point. Jews and Gentiles alike have a law written on their hearts. The Israelites coming out of Egypt under Moses' leadership received the law in more explicit fashion, inscribed by the finger of God on tablets of stone. Still more detailed laws and prophecies were recorded on papyrus scrolls. And today the entire Word of God is easily available to practically anyone on paper or in electronic form. No one gets to claim ignorance. And no one gets to claim innocence.

But worse than that, no one has the ability to break free from this sinful condition. Sin is a bitter bondage, and people under the power of sin are absolutely helpless to rid themselves of guilt in this life or escape horrible judgment in the life to come. This is not a problem only for derelicts, mass murderers, evil dictators, and other especially foul types of sinners. In our natural fallen state, we "are all under sin" (Romans 3:9, emphasis added). And "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20). That's Paul's point, and no one gets an exemption.

This, then, is the clear, bottom-line, starting-point truth in the gospel Paul preached: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). No one escapes that verdict. We have no capacity to break free of our sin or eliminate its guilt. Left to ourselves, we would be eternally damned. And that's what we deserve.

All who come to genuine saving faith join with the penitent thief on the cross in saying "we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds" and looking to Christ, who "has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41). ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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Enjoying God is a Command

While shaking hands at the church door, ministers are sometimes greeted with a spontaneous, “I really enjoyed that!”—which is immediately followed by, “Oh! I shouldn’t really say that, should I?” I usually grip tighter, hold the handshake a little longer, and say with a smile, “Doesn’t the catechism’s first question encourage us to do that? If we are to enjoy Him forever, why not begin now?”

Of course, we cannot enjoy God apart from glorifying Him. And the Westminster Shorter Catechism wisely goes on to ask, “What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?” But notice that Scripture contains the “rule” for enjoying God as well as glorifying Him. We know it abounds in instructions for glorifying Him, but how does it instruct us to “enjoy him”?

Enjoying God is a command, not an optional extra: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). But how? We cannot “rejoice to order,” can we?

True. Yet, Scripture shows that well-instructed believers develop a determination to rejoice. They will rejoice in the Lord. Habakkuk exemplified this in difficult days (see Habakkuk 3:17–18). He exercised what our forefathers called “acting faith”—a vigorous determination to experience whatever the Lord commands, including joy, and to use the God-given means to do so. Here are four of these means—in which, it should be noted, we also glorify God.

Joy in Salvation

Enjoying God means relishing the salvation He gives us in Jesus Christ. “I will take joy in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:18). God takes joy in our salvation (Luke 15:6–7, 9–10, 32). So should we. Here, Ephesians 1:3–14 provides a masterly delineation of this salvation in Christ. It is a gospel bath in which we should often luxuriate, rungs on a ladder we should frequently climb, in order to experience the joy of the Lord as our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). While we are commanded to have joy, the resources to do so are outside of ourselves, known only through union with Christ.

Joy in Revelation

Joy issues from devouring inscripturated revelation. Psalm 119 bears repeated witness to this. The psalmist “delights” in God’s testimonies “as much as in all riches” (Psalm 119:14; see also vv. 35, 47, 70, 77, 103, 162, 174). Think of Jesus’ words, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). Does He mean He will find His joy in us, so that our joy may be full, or that His joy will be in us so that our joy may be full? Both, surely, are true. We find full joy in the Lord only when we know He finds His joy in us. The pathway to joy, then, is to give ourselves maximum exposure to His Word and to let it dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16). It is joy-food for the joy-hungry soul.

Joy in Communion

There is joy in the Lord to be tasted in the worship we enjoy in church communion. The church is the new Jerusalem, the city that cannot be hidden, the joy of the whole earth (Psalm 48:2). In the Spirit-led communion of praise and petition; soul pastoring; Word preaching; psalm, hymn, and spiritual song singing; and water, bread, and wine receiving, abundant joy is to be found. The Lord sings over us with joy (Zephaniah 3:17). Our hearts sing for joy in return.



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Joy in Tribulation

Here, indeed, is a divine paradox. There is joy to be known in the midst of and through affliction. Viewed biblically, tribulation is the Father's chastising hand using life's pain and darkness to mold us into the image of the One who endured for the sake of the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12: 1–2, 5–11; see Romans 8:29). We exult and rejoice in our sufferings, Paul says, because "suffering produces . . . hope" in us (Romans 5:3–4). Peter and James echo the same principle (1 Peter 1:3–8; James 1:2–4). The knowledge of the sure hand of God in providence not only brings stability; it is also a joy-producer.

All of this adds up to exultation in God Himself. In Romans 5:1–11, Paul leads us from rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God (v. 2) to joy that comes in tribulation (v. 3) to exulting in God Himself (v. 11; see Psalm 43:4). The unbeliever finds this incredible, because he has been blinded by the joy-depriving lie of Satan that to glorify God is the high road to joylessness. Thankfully, Christ reveals that the reverse takes place in Him—because of our salvation, through His revelation, in worship's blessed communion, and by means of tribulation.

Enjoy! Yes, indeed, may "everlasting joy . . . be upon [your] heads" (Isaiah 51:11). ~ *Dr. Sinclair Ferguson*

Moving Out of the Temple

On the mountain of transfiguration, the disciples were stunned by the breakthrough of the dazzling glory of Christ. What previously was veiled by His humanity, hidden from the sight of mortals, suddenly burst through the veil in translucent radiance. With but one glimpse, the disciples were paralyzed. They had but one consuming desire—to abide in that place, basking forever in the light of His countenance. Jesus would have none of it. As Lord of the church, He commanded His disciples to forget about pitching tents and sent them down the mountain and into the world.

The day Christ died, those same disciples went into hiding. They retreated to the shelter of the upper room, where they huddled together in fear. When Jesus broke the bonds of death, He went to the upper room. In a sense, He broke down the door—not so much to get in, but to get His disciples out. His mandate to them was to await the Spirit and then to go—to move out of the temple and into the world.

The New Testament word for "marketplace" is agora. The agora was not only the shopping district, but was also the center of civic life. The agora was surrounded by public buildings, shops, and colonnades. Here the children played, the idle loafed, lawsuits were heard, and public events were produced. It was public, not private; open, not secret; dangerous, not safe.

The cradle of the church was the marketplace. From the preaching and public ministry of Jesus to the daily acts of the apostles, the central scene was the marketplace. Are we actively moving outside the walls of the church and taking our faith to the world? ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



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Keeping the Faith in a Faithless Age

“The greatest question of our time,” historian Will Durant offered, “is not communism versus individualism, not Europe versus America, not even East versus the West; it is whether men can live without God.” That question, it now appears, will be answered in our own day.

For centuries, the Christian church has been the center of Western civilization. Western culture, government, law, and society were based on explicitly Christian principles. Concern for the individual, a commitment to human rights, and respect for the good, the beautiful, and the true—all of these grew out of Christian convictions and the influence of revealed religion.

All of these, we now hasten to add, are under serious attack. The very notion of right and wrong is now discarded by large sectors of American society. Where it is not discarded, it is often debased. Taking a page out of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, modern secularists simply declare wrong, right, and right, wrong.

A NEW LANDSCAPE

Quaker theologian D. Elton Trueblood once described America as a “cut flower civilization.” Our culture, he argued, is cut off from its Christian roots like a flower cut at the stem. Though the flower will hold its beauty for a time, it is destined to wither and die.

When Trueblood spoke those words more than two decades ago, the flower still had some color and signs of life. But the blossom has long since lost its vitality, and it is time for the fallen petals to be acknowledged.

“If God does not exist,” Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov argued, “everything is permitted.” The permissiveness of modern American society can scarcely be exaggerated, but it can be traced directly to the fact that modern men and women act as if God does not exist or is powerless to accomplish His will.

The Christian church now finds itself facing a new reality. The church no longer represents the central core of Western culture. Though outposts of Christian influence remain, these are exceptions rather than the rule. For the most part, the church has been displaced by the reign of secularism.

The daily newspaper brings a constant barrage that confirms the current state of American society. This age is not the first to see unspeakable horror and evil, but it is the first to deny any consistent basis for identifying evil as evil or good as good.

The faithful church is, for the most part, tolerated as one voice in the public arena, but only so long as it does not attempt to exercise any credible influence on the state of affairs. Should the church speak forcefully to an issue of public debate, it is castigated as coercive and out of date.

A NEW ROLE

How does the church think of itself as it faces this new reality? During the 1980s, it was possible to think in ambitious terms about the church as the vanguard of a moral majority. That confidence has been seriously shaken by the events of the past decade.



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Little progress toward the re-establishment of a moral center of gravity can be detected. Instead, the culture has moved swiftly toward a more complete abandonment of all moral conviction.

The confessing church must now be willing to be a moral minority, if that is what the times demand. The church has no right to follow the secular siren call toward moral revisionism and politically correct positions on the issues of the day.

Whatever the issue, the church must speak as the church—that is, as the community of fallen but redeemed, who stand under divine authority. The concern of the church is not to know its own mind, but to know and follow the mind of God. The church's convictions must not emerge from the ashes of our own fallen wisdom but from the authoritative Word of God, which reveals the wisdom of God and His commands.

The church is to be a community of character. The character produced by a people who stand under the authority of the sovereign God of the universe will inevitably be at odds with a culture of unbelief.

AN OLD CALL

The American church faces a new situation. This new context is as current as the morning newspaper and as old as those first Christian churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Laodicea, and Rome. Eternity will record whether the American church is willing to submit only to the authority of God or whether the church will forfeit its calling in order to serve lesser gods.

The church must awaken to its status as a moral minority and hold fast to the gospel we have been entrusted to preach. In so doing, the deep springs of permanent truth will reveal the church to be a life-giving oasis amid America's moral desert. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr. - President and Joseph Emerson Brown Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.*



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

If you have a August birthday or anniversary that is not posted here or is listed in error, please e-mail Walt (gwlcfl0415@gmail.com).

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner August 2020

Ben S. (8)

Phyllis C. (27)

Mike and Cheryl P. (9)

Carrie P. (24)

Marlin H. (27)

Ezra P. (26)

Martin Luther declared that a new Christian must withdraw from the world for a season, but upon reaching spiritual maturity he must embrace the world as the theater of redemptive activity. His message was, “Away with the cowards who flee from the real world and cloak their cowardice with piety.”

Perhaps the greatest need for our day is the need to market Jesus Christ. The church must become expert in marketing, not in the slick Madison Avenue style but in an aggressive, yet dignified way. The marketplace is where we belong. It is where needy people are found. It is not enough for the church to hang a welcome sign on her door. We dare not wait for the world to come to us.

God never intended the Christian community to be a ghetto. The church is not a reservation. Yet the pervasive style of modern evangelicalism is that of a reservation or a ghetto. We can argue that it is the secularist agenda to put us there and keep us there. But such arguments won't do. We are there because it is safe and comfortable to be there.

The secularist hates the light and is quite willing to offer us a bushel for it. Shame on us when we buy custom-made bushels and willingly place them over our candles. To hide the light or to restrict it to a reservation is to do violence to the gospel and to grieve the Holy Ghost. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



***West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership***

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