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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Be Immune to Circumstance

In the weeks prior to October 29, 1929 Wall Street stock brokers were a contented bunch. The stock market had been on a bullish run that looked like it would never end. In fact, its value had increased ten-fold over the previous nine years. No one could have imagined that it was all about to implode in a stock market crash that dwarfs the 2007 Global Financial Crisis. That disastrous day—Black Tuesday, October 29—brought an abrupt end to the prosperity of the Roaring Twenties and triggered the Great Depression.

Those who were at ground zero were completely unprepared for the sudden change in financial circumstances. History records that many stockbrokers jumped to their deaths from their skyscraper offices. For them, death was a preferable option to the discontentment of poverty.

The apostle Paul never dealt with the sudden changes of the stock market, but he did understand the vagaries of this present world. And he refused to let his contentment ebb and flow with the changing tides of circumstance. In fact you could argue that, at least in natural terms, the circumstances of his life in ministry were perpetually bad. His résumé included multiple imprisonments, innumerable beatings, three shipwrecks, exposure to the elements, hunger, thirst, and a life constantly under threat from spiritual enemies and theological wolves (2 Corinthians 11:23–28).

But Paul learned to be content amidst all of the pressure and adversity he faced—and so can we. Dr. John MacArthur, after many decades of pastoral ministry made this observation:

The one thing that steals our contentment more than anything else is trying circumstances. We crumble and lose our sense of satisfaction and peace when we allow our circumstances to victimize us. No doubt Paul was human and suffered that way too but then he learned a different way: remaining content no matter what his circumstances were. *“I have learned to be content,”* he said, *“in whatever circumstances I am”* (Philippians 4:11–12). And he really meant whatever circumstances, for in the next verse he ran the gamut of extremes from great poverty to great wealth.

It’s possible for us as Christians to learn to be content in facing any situation in life. And we don’t have to wait for the next life to be able to do this. We do need to keep one foot in the next life, however. Paul said it this way: *“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth”* (Colossians 3:2). *“Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”* (2 Corinthians 4:17–18, NIV). Paul endured many horrific circumstances but through them he learned to be content by having an eternal perspective.



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Few of us would argue with Paul. We marvel at his contentment that transcended any and every earthly circumstance. But a hearty amen doesn't immediately translate to a life faithfully modeled on Paul's example. Our flesh is defiant to biblical subjugation, especially in the heat of battle. For that reason Dr. John MacArthur urges Christians to focus on renewing the mind, that it would be increasingly impervious to the volatility of life:

Realize any circumstance you face is only temporary. The energy you're tempted to expend on it by getting anxious isn't worth being compared with your eternal reward. Learn to be content by not taking your earthly circumstances too seriously.

The above blog post was originally published on September 1, 2016 by *Cameron Buettel/Seminary Student at the Master's Seminary in Greater Los Angeles Area ~ Grace Community Church - Pastored by Dr. John MacArthur*

Examining the Clues

John's vision in Revelation gives us some clues about what heaven is like. Heaven is charged with the absence of things that are conspicuously present in our earthly environment. What is absent? Some of the missing things include tears, death, sorrow, and pain: "*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away*" (Revelation 21:4, NIV).

Certain types of people will also be absent. No unbelievers, abominable and sexually immoral people, murderers, sorcerers, idolaters, or liars will live in that place. This indicates that heaven will be a place where sin is totally absent.

The New Jerusalem will have neither tabernacle nor temple. These were but earthly types, shadows of what is to come. When the reality appears, the shadows depart. "*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple*" (Revelation 21:22, NIV).

The new heaven will have no sun or moon. They are unnecessary because the glory of God gives it light. In heaven there is no night. Nothing can eclipse or dim the light of the refulgent glory of God. No darkness can overcome or even intrude into the splendor of the One who is the Light of the World.

Finally, there will be no curse there. The curse on the cosmic order, which produces groans from the whole creation, will be lifted. It will be banished from heaven. No death, no pain, and no struggle will curse the human enterprise. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



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The Ordinary Means of Grace

I have never heard a Christian say he does not believe that God is sovereign. But I have heard many professing Christians define the sovereignty of God in a way that ultimately makes man sovereign over God. It is a view of sovereignty where man is big and God is small. People will say, “*I know God is sovereign, but . . .*” Truthfully, many professing Christians don’t actually believe that God is sovereign. And if we don’t believe that God is sovereign, we don’t actually believe that God is God. Yet, the problem goes much deeper than that.

Many Christians who profess to believe that God is sovereign over all believe in a sort of sovereignty that is more akin to Islamic determinism than biblical theism, a sort of theistic nihilism that believes nothing we do really matters—that God is sovereign and we are mere puppets on a string. That is not the biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God. He reveals in Scripture that He is indeed sovereign over all things, that He has foreordained all things that come to pass, and that He is neither the author nor approver of sin (Isaiah 46:10; James 1:13; Westminster Confession of Faith 3.1). He reveals that He is sovereign over all and that we are culpable for our actions (Acts 2:23). He discloses that He is the primary cause and that He uses secondary causes—such as us—to bring about His ultimate ends (Proverbs 16:33; John 19:11). He reveals that while He has ordained the ends of all things, He has also ordained the means to all ends (Acts 4:27–28).

When it comes to our worship of God, too many Christians think that it doesn’t really matter what we do or how we do it because our sovereign God can use any means to accomplish His ultimate purposes. That, however, does not justify our using means that God has not given us. Nevertheless, many Christians and many churches believe that we may use whatever cleverly devised means we invent to bring about our desired ends.

If we actually believe God is sovereign, we must trust His sovereignly appointed means to bring about His desired ends. The means that God has appointed for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace are what we call the ordinary means of grace—namely, the Word, prayer, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and, necessarily joined to these, the church’s discipline and care of souls. These means are appointed by God, are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and point us to Christ, and they sustain us and nourish us in our union with Christ as we rest in the sovereign ends of our triune God. ~ *Dr. Burk Parsons - Editor of Tabletalk magazine and serves as Senior Pastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla.*

Demonize Church Discipline

In our striving to destroy the church, it is imperative that you first understand what true churches are. You must not waste your time among those so-called churches where our master has been thus far successful in blinding the eyes of the shepherds and thus the sheep. In those so-called churches, after many decades of our tireless work, they have done away with the pure preaching of the Word of our Enemy, the right administration of the sacraments, and church discipline, which we have long known are the marks of the true church. Wherever we see these marks of the church practiced, it is there where we must level our most savage attack using every weapon in our arsenal.

In order to destroy a church, we have found that the first step is the easiest—particularly in recent years. *First*, get the church to do away with church discipline—or at least get them to mostly ignore it. The primary way you should do this is by convincing the shepherds of the church that church discipline isn’t very nice, that it hurts people’s feelings—that it’s not loving, that it’s not gracious.



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Demonize Church Discipline

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Once you can get the shepherds to buy into this, your work is half done. *Additionally*, encourage them to stop preaching about sin, hell, and our Enemy's wrath and judgment, and against particular sins so as not to offend anyone. If you do this, you've got shepherds (and thus their churches) where you want them. Your efforts here will complement our work in many of the Enemy's seminaries, where we are striving to lay the necessary groundwork.

The *next step* is a bit tricky. Work on the other shepherds one at a time, convincing them that admonishing unrepentant people is hard work—that it isn't very encouraging. Convince them that fencing the Enemy's table is unnecessary and too time consuming, that barring unrepentant people from the Enemy's table is just plain mean, and excommunicating the unrepentant and handing them over to our master is cruel and harsh. Also, get them to completely forget about the restoration of repentant sinners, since we work very hard not to let that happen.

Once you have the shepherds of the church convinced, there's little left for you to do before moving on to the next church. But be careful in your attack. Take your time. Pick off the sheep one at a time, with a smile on your face and whispers of love and peace on your lips. In doing so, you will rightly reflect the appearance of our master, who has long disguised himself as an angel of light. In your efforts, never forget that our master prowls like a roaring lion, but he never actually roars. If he were to do so, he would give himself away before his work is done. ~ *Dr. Burk Parsons - Editor of Tabletalk magazine and serves as Senior Pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla.*

American Nitpickers

American Pickers is a television series about a couple of guys who own an antiques business in Iowa. They travel around the United States digging through old barns, attics, warehouses, and just about any other imaginable place where things accumulate in order to find items for resale. They buy and sell everything from old cars and motorcycles to old toys and signs. I enjoy watching it from time to time because some of the places they "*pick*" remind me of my grandparents' home in Texas, a place I loved to explore when I visited as a child. Recently, while watching the program, my son Joseph grinned and said that someone needs to make a show called *American Nitpickers*. I told him that I was going to have to borrow that title, and he said that was fine as long as I gave him credit for thinking of it. So, a tip of the hat to Joey for the title.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a nitpicker as "*a pedantic critic; one who searches for and over-emphasizes trivial errors.*" Before proceeding any further, let me clarify by mentioning a few things that, in my opinion, certainly do not qualify to be dismissed as nitpicking. It is not nitpicking to desire and expect excellence in your own work and the work of others. It is certainly not nitpicking to point out mistakes when people's lives are on the line. If a supervisor at an airline maintenance facility discovers that an employee has made an error that would result in catastrophic engine failure if not corrected, the supervisor is not being nitpicky. Note again that the definition of a nitpicker involves trivial errors.



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American Nitpickers *Continued from Page 4*

It is also not nitpicking to seek precision in our understanding of Scripture. Some people, even many professing Christians, would relegate all theological debate and criticism to the category of nitpicking. They consider most or all differences over biblical interpretation and Christian doctrine and practice to be trivial. It doesn't matter what you believe about God or Jesus Christ or the atonement or justification, they say. What matters is that we tolerate one another. Of course, if the Bible were merely a human book and if God did not exist, they would be correct. However, if God is who He reveals Himself to be (*and He is*), and if Scripture is His inspired Word (*and it is*), then we need to think twice and then think again before treating His self-revelation so flippantly. Seeking clarity and precision in biblical interpretation and theology is not nitpicking because when God speaks, it is not trivial. Nitpicking is searching for and pointing out trivial errors. While some theological errors are more significant than others, none are trivial, because all theological errors concern God in some way.

In short, recognizing and pointing out important errors is not nitpicking. The question I would like to consider is this: Do we ever encounter nitpicking in the church? A better way for each of us to ask this would be, Do I ever engage in nitpicking in regard to the church? Before you answer the question, try a thought experiment. Imagine that you found out someone had secretly placed a recording device in your car and had recorded your conversations every Sunday on the way home from church. Imagine they had a year's worth of recordings. Now ask yourself whether you would want anyone to hear those conversations. Would you want your pastor to hear those conversations?

Perhaps you would have nothing to be embarrassed about. But I imagine some of us would be mortified if we knew the pastor would hear all those conversations. Why? Because of our tendency to nitpick trivial issues regarding the sermon, or the music, or the announcements. You name it; we can find something to complain about it. Again, I'm not referring to critical and thoughtful reflection on a sermon or questions about it. That is not nitpicking. Nor am I speaking of a situation in which the preacher made a serious theological error. Talking about that would not be nitpicking. I'm referring to a habitual practice of finding something unimportant to complain and gripe about.

I believe that our tendency to nitpick at everything related to the Sunday morning worship service may be related to our hyper-consumerist culture. In this culture, the mantra is: The customer is always right. We seem to have taken this way of thinking and applied it to the church. We sometimes approach the church as consumers rather than as worshipers. We go church shopping and end up church hopping when the make and model of the church isn't to our satisfaction. We walk into the sanctuary running our finger over the pew searching for dust rather than searching our hearts for sin and repenting in dust and ashes. We attend to the service the way we might attend to a film or concert and go home criticizing everything we didn't like about the "performance." We become nitpickers.

A particular focus of this nitpicking attitude is often the pastor. We criticize him for everything imaginable. His sermon was too long. His sermon was too short. He talks about the original languages too much. He talks about the original languages too little. He spends too much time on doctrine and doesn't focus enough on practical application. He spends too much time on practical application and doesn't focus enough on doctrine. His hair is too long. His tie is too short. His kids are too fidgety; he must not discipline them at home.



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American Nitpickers

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His kids behave too well; he must be a tyrant at home. And so on. If the pastor doesn't become the focal point of our criticism, then it's the music, or the choir, or the way the bread and wine are distributed in the Lord's Supper.

Most people have no idea how difficult the work of a pastor is. Whatever you might think, a pastor doesn't work for an hour on Sunday and then spend the rest of the week lounging around the pool. If you were to accompany a pastor for a week, you would likely leave stunned and exhausted. Rather than nitpick our pastors to death, let us pray for them instead. Let us pray for our pastors who put in hours and hours preparing for Sunday morning, all the while they are visiting homes and hospitals, counseling those dealing with all manner of problems and leading their own families. Let us also pray for those who put in untold hours preparing and cleaning the sanctuary and for those who put in untold hours preparing and practicing music. Let us pray for our brothers and sisters with whom we will gather to worship. And if we are going to criticize, let us start with ourselves. Let us take the beam out of our own eye before nitpicking at the specks in everyone else's eyes. ~ **Dr. Keith A. Mathison - Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla.**

Preaching the Wrath of God

The Genevan Reformer John Calvin said, "*Preaching is the public exposition of Scripture by the man sent from God, in which God Himself is present in judgment and in grace.*" Faithful pulpit ministry requires the declaration of both judgment and grace. The Word of God is a sharp, two-edged sword that softens and hardens, comforts and afflicts, saves and damns.

The preaching of divine wrath serves as a black velvet backdrop that causes the diamond of God's mercy to shine brighter than ten thousand suns. It is upon the dark canvas of divine wrath that the splendor of His saving grace most fully radiates. Preaching the wrath of God most brilliantly showcases His gracious mercy toward sinners.

Like trumpeters on the castle wall warning of coming disaster, preachers must proclaim the full counsel of God. Those who stand in pulpits must preach the whole body of truth in the Scriptures, which includes both sovereign wrath and supreme love. They cannot pick and choose what they want to preach. Addressing the wrath of God is never optional for a faithful preacher—it is a divine mandate.

Tragically, preaching that deals with God's impending judgment is absent from many contemporary pulpits. Preachers have become apologetic regarding the wrath of God, if not altogether silent. In order to magnify the love of God, many argue, the preacher must downplay His wrath. But to omit God's wrath is to obscure His amazing love. Strangely enough, it is merciless to withhold the declaration of divine vengeance.

Why is preaching divine wrath so necessary? **First**, the holy character of God demands it. An essential part of God's moral perfection is His hatred of sin. A.W. Pink asserts, "*The wrath of God is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin.*" God is "a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29) who "*feels indignation every day*" (Psalm 7:11) toward the wicked.



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God has “*hated wickedness*” (Psalm 45:7) and is angered toward all that is contrary to His perfect character. He will, therefore, “*destroy*” (Psalm 5:6) sinners in the Day of Judgment.

Every preacher must declare the wrath of God or marginalize His holiness, love, and righteousness. Because God is holy, He is separated from all sin and utterly opposed to every sinner. Because God is love, He delights in purity and must, of necessity, hate all that is unholy. Because God is righteous, He must punish the sin that violates His holiness.

Second, the ministry of the prophets demands it. The prophets of old frequently proclaimed that their hearers, because of their continual wickedness, were storing up for themselves the wrath of God (Jeremiah 4:4). In the Old Testament, more than twenty words are used to describe the wrath of God, and these words are used in their various forms a total of 580 times. Time and again, the prophets spoke with vivid imagery to describe God’s wrath unleashed upon wickedness. The last of the prophets, John the Baptist, spoke of “*the wrath to come*” (Matthew 3:7). From Moses to the forerunner of Christ, there was a continual strain of warning to the impenitent of the divine fury that awaits.

Third, the preaching of Christ demands it. Ironically, Jesus had more to say about divine wrath than anyone else in the Bible. Our Lord spoke about God’s wrath more than He spoke of God’s love. Jesus warned about “*fiery hell*” (Matthew 5:22) and eternal “*destruction*” (Matthew 7:13) where there is “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 8:12). Simply put, Jesus was a hellfire and damnation preacher. Men in pulpits would do well to follow the example of Christ in their preaching.

Fourth, the glory of the cross demands it. Christ suffered the wrath of God for all who would call upon Him. If there is no divine wrath, there is no need for the cross, much less for the salvation of lost souls. From what would sinners need to be saved? It is only when we recognize the reality of God’s wrath against those deserving of judgment that we find the cross to be such glorious news. Too many pulpiteers today boast in having a cross-centered ministry but rarely, if ever, preach divine wrath. This is a violation of the cross itself.

Fifth, the teaching of the Apostles demands it. Those directly commissioned by Christ were mandated to proclaim all that He commanded (Matthew 28:20). This necessitates proclaiming God’s righteous indignation toward sinners. The Apostle Paul warns unbelievers of the “*God who inflicts wrath*” (Romans 3:5) and declares that only Jesus can “*deliver us from the wrath to come*” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Peter writes about “*the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly*” (2 Peter 3:7). Jude addresses the “*punishment of eternal fire*” (Jude 7). John describes “*the wrath of the Lamb*” (Revelation 6:16). Clearly, the New Testament writers recognized the necessity of preaching God’s wrath.

Preachers must not shrink away from proclaiming the righteous anger of God toward hell-deserving sinners. God has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). That day is looming on the horizon. Like the prophets and Apostles, and even Christ Himself, we too must warn unbelievers of this coming dreadful day and compel them to flee to Christ, who alone is mighty to save. ~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson - Founder and President of OnePassion Ministries.**



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

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner July 2020

Luke W. (4)

Sadie H. (13)

Elijah D. (16)

Jubilee H. (18)

Teresa H. (21)

Christina W. (23)

David and Jennifer A. (4)

Les and Jessica T. (17)

Listening to Your Conscience

“My conscience is held captive by the Word of God. And to act against conscience is neither right nor safe.”

These words formed a crucial part of Martin Luther’s fateful response to authorities of church and state when he was ordered to recant of his teachings at the Diet of Worms in 1521. He was pleading that his intention was to be neither rebellious nor obstreperous, but to be faithful to Scripture. What Luther was declaring was not so much that he would not recant but that he could not recant.

Luther used the metaphor of the prisoner. He was as a man in chains, incarcerated, with no option of liberty by which he was able to do what the authorities commanded. He was not physically restrained. The irons that gripped him were of a moral sort. It was his conscience that had been captured by the Holy Ghost.

The only option by which he could please men was the option to act against his conscience. To act for men was to act against God. Though the stakes were high, the decision was actually a “no brainer.” Scripture declares that whatever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23). ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



**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 it’s leadership.