



West Suffolk Epistle



Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America



West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”

Volume 1, Issue 2

May 2014

Three Tips on Being a Friend of Sinners

Jesus was accused of being a friend of sinners. That was the word on the street in first-century Palestine.

The precise phrase — *“friend of sinners”* — is mentioned twice in the Gospels, in Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34. The naysayers of the day, the religious aristocracy, criticized Jesus as a “glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”

They called him this because it was true. He was a friend of sinners. Jesus himself said that he didn’t come for the spiritually healthy, but for the sick. *“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance”* (Luke 5:31–32).

Just like he greeted children that others thought were a nuisance, he welcomed sinners that others didn’t (Matthew 19:14; Luke 7:37–39). He looked at them, as Mark says he did with the rich young man, and he loved them (Mark 10:21). He had compassion on them. And most glorious of all, he wielded his authority to speak those wondrous words, *“Your sins are forgiven”* (Luke 7:48).

This is all very important for us because, as some have noted recently, we Christians pattern our lives after Jesus’s example. He has, after all, sent us into the world in the same Spirit of his own mission (John 20:21–22).

If Jesus was a friend of sinners, we should be too, it seems — somehow, someway. And instantly, this discussion can drift into a much bigger one about Christians and culture and all that. But instead of going there, let’s just talk friendship for a minute. Friendship, which is not without its implications, is more practical and relevant than a primer on the church’s posture in society. So in that light, here are **three** tips on being a friend of sinners.

1. Be okay with marginal.

In the example of Jesus, we need to be all right with marginal all the way around. Be okay with associating with the marginal, the poor, the destitute — those often overlooked in society (Luke 7:22). Go there. Be with this people. Serve them. Learn from them. And be okay with being thought marginal yourself (Matthew 19:6–9), or non-progressive or backwater or against sexual modernity — whatever they are saying these days about the Christian conscience. The truth is that many of our neighbors, especially in urban contexts, will think we’re weird. Or stupid. Or close-minded. Or judgmental. Or just simply out of touch with the new post-Christian world.

Popular opinion will continue to cast Christian ethics as outdated and antithetical to the development of the American self. We’ll often find ourselves, in the coffee shop, on the light-rail, at the theater, to be the only ones there who don’t think same-sex “marriage” is the coolest thing since sliced bread. The number of those who share our convictions, or are open to listening, may continue to dwindle. And, really, this is fine. It’s okay. Our calling doesn’t live or die by societal acceptance.

2. Aim to love, not be liked.

We must nail this down. The aim of our charge is love, not popularity (1 Timothy 1:5). Jesus constantly infuriated the popular ideals of his day. They knew his teaching contradicted their own, and rather than like him and wrap their arms around him in happy tolerance, they tried to shut him up (Mark 12:12). *“If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household”* (Matthew 10:25).

~Continued on Page 2~



West Suffolk Epistle



Three Tips on Being a Friend of Sinners

Jesus wasn't a fan favorite. They crucified him, remember? The leaders and the people. Not to mention that alongside Jesus's reputation for shady associations was the utter absence of popularity baiting. *"Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances . . ."* (Mark 12:14). This means Jesus didn't let the crowd's facial expressions dictate his message. Or pageviews. Or book sales.

In a sense, there is a holy disregard for what outsiders think, but that's not the whole story. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul lays out that one of the qualifications to be an elder is that *"he must be well thought of by outsiders"* (1 Timothy 3:7). As David Mathis writes, we care what others think because God cares. Ultimately, *"we want outsiders to become insiders."* Jesus came to serve, not be served (Mark 10:45), and the same goes for us. We are in this world to serve, not be pampered. To love, not be applauded. To bless, not be notarized. So we should care about our reputation — to serve and love and bless — but that doesn't mean trying so hard to be liked by everybody. Having a respectable reputation is one thing, trying to get everyone to throw their arm around us is another.

3. Put the gospel to work.

This means, first and foremost, that the most important thing we could ever say is that Jesus is Lord. He is the risen King of the universe, alive now and reigning in his mercy and love, commanding all people everywhere to repent and come home. This is amazingly good news, and it is controversial. If we believe this, and say it, some sinners won't want to be our friends. Nevertheless, the news is still good. The truth is still compelling. Its beauty is never diminished.

A few of the most practical ways we might put the gospel to work as friends of sinners is captured by Tim Keller in Center Church. Leaning on Simon Gathercole's outline of the gospel as Jesus's incarnation, substitution, and resurrection, Keller considers three aspects in which the gospel impacts our lives. He calls it the **"upside-down"** aspect, the **"inside-out"** aspect, and the **"forward-back"** aspect — each of which are opposite the world's way of thinking (46–48). **Upside-down** is rooted in the most glorious, humble event in history. God became a man. He suffered. He died. Our message and lives are marked by this relentless posture of servanthood. **Inside-out** gets at the great work Jesus did by taking our place on the cross. He died for us, sinners as we were, and was raised for us by sheer mercy — to bring us to God and accept us not based upon our works, but solely by his grace. This electing grace has no preconditions. It's lavished on the worst of sinners and tidiest of Pharisees, giving us all the eyes of faith. Then the **forward-back**, the kingdom Jesus inaugurated by his victory over the grave, reminds us that we are destined for another world, a better one. Heaven will be on earth, but not yet. The world will be made completely new, but now we're still working and waiting, loving the lost, telling God's story.

When these truths touch our lives and are put to work in our relationships, we'll be walking in the steps of our Savior. When this world-shaking wonder orders the way we, sinners saved by grace, think about those around us, sinners in need of grace, then, and only then, we'll make for good friends. Then we'll be good friends of sinners, like the true and better "friend of sinners." ~ *Jonathan Parnell - writer and content strategist at Desiring God (John Piper).*

Almost Too Wonderful to Believe

"What a great thing it is to walk through this world knowing that though few here give you a second glance, everyone in heaven looks on with baited wonder that God, the Almighty King of Glory, has chosen to live inside your frail, poor flesh." ~ *Joel Beeke (from his commentary on I John)*

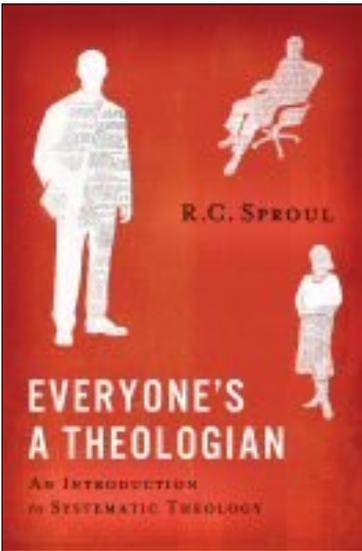


West Suffolk Epistle



Book Reviews

Everyone's a Theologian - Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.



Dr. R. C. Sproul, Sr. is a respected teacher, theologian, and pastor. He is the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries where he serves as executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine. Sproul holds degrees from Westminster College, Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary, Free University of Amsterdam, and Whitefield Theological Seminary.

Many people react negatively to the word theology, believing that it involves dry, fruitless arguments about minute points of doctrine. They prefer to focus on the basic truths of Scripture and may even declare, “No creed but Christ.” But as Dr. Sproul, Sr. argues, everyone is a theologian. Any time we think about a teaching of the Bible and strive to understand it, we are engaging in theology. Therefore, it is important that we put the Bible’s varied teachings together in a systematic fashion using proper, time-tested methods of interpretation so as to arrive at a theology that is founded on truth.

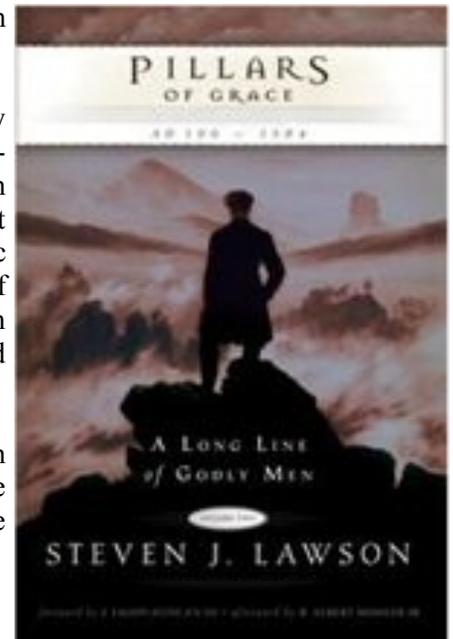
That is precisely what Sproul does in “Everyone’s a Theologian”. Dr. Sproul, Sr. demonstrating his trademark ability to make complex subjects easily understood, surveys the basic truths of the Christian faith, reminding us once more of what God is like and of what he has done for his people in this world and the next.

Pillars of Grace - Dr. Steven J. Lawson

Dr. Steven J. Lawson is the senior pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama.

The doctrines of grace are often known as the five points of Calvinism, but they were not the invention of John Calvin or his reforming cohorts of the sixteenth century. Rather, they are biblical doctrines, as Dr. Steven J. Lawson demonstrated in his book *Foundations of Grace*. Now, in *Pillars of Grace*, Dr. Lawson shows that the doctrines of grace have been understood and taught—sometimes in embryonic form, sometimes with great clarity—throughout church history. From the time of the early church fathers to the years of the Reformers, there have been key men in the church, pillars as it were, who stood on the foundation of Scripture and upheld the truth of God’s sovereign role in salvation.

In *Pillars of Grace*, Dr. Lawson walks readers through the ups and downs of church history, profiling these voices for the truth. The inescapable conclusion is that the doctrines of grace are no innovation, but the consistent witness of some of the greatest men of the church.





West Suffolk Epistle



Who are some of the contributors to our Newsletter?



Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., serves as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary—the flagship school of the Southern Baptist Convention and one of the largest seminaries in the world. Dr. Mohler is a theologian and an ordained minister, having served as pastor and staff minister of several Southern Baptist churches. He came to the presidency of Southern Seminary from service as editor of *The Christian Index*, the oldest of the state papers serving the Southern Baptist Convention. A native of Lakeland, Florida, Dr. Mohler was a Faculty Scholar at Florida Atlantic University before receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. He holds a Master of Divinity degree and the Doctor of Philosophy (in systematic and historical theology) from Southern Seminary. He has pursued additional study at the St. Meinrad School of Theology and has done research at Oxford University (England).

Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. was born in 1939 in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. He is president of Ligonier Academy of Biblical and Theological Studies and the founder and chairman of the ministry that began in 1971 as the Ligonier Valley Study Center in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. In an effort to respond more effectively to the growing demand for Dr. Sproul’s teachings and the ministry’s other educational resources, the general offices were moved to Orlando, Florida, in 1984, and the ministry was renamed “Ligonier Ministries.” Dr. Sproul holds degrees from Westminster College, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and the Free University of Amsterdam, and he has had a distinguished academic teaching career at various colleges and seminaries, including Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, and Jackson, Mississippi.



Dr. Steven J. Lawson is president of OnePassion Ministries, a ministry designed to bring about biblical reformation in the church today. He is also the Senior Pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama, having served as a pastor in Arkansas and Alabama for over thirty years.

He is the Professor of Preaching in the masters and doctoral programs at The Master’s Seminary, where he also serves on the Board of Directors of The Master’s Seminary and College in Sun Valley, California. Dr. Lawson also serves as a Teaching Fellow with Ligonier Ministries located in Orlando, Florida, where he lectures as a Visiting Professor in the Doctor of Ministry program at the Ligonier Academy. He is also on the board of Ligonier Ministries.

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson is Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. A graduate of the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, he is the author of some two dozen books, has authored numerous articles and has contributed to various symposia. His writing interests have ranged from works of scholarship to books for children. He has served as minister of two congregations in Scotland, one on Unst, the most northerly inhabited island in the United Kingdom, and the other at the center of Glasgow, the largest city in Scotland. He has served more than twenty years as a seminary professor and is currently on the faculty of Redeemer Seminary in Dallas, Texas as well as part time faculty of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.





West Suffolk Epistle



Who are some of the contributors to our Newsletter?



Dr. Joel Beeke is president and Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, a pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, editor of *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*, editorial director of Reformation Heritage Books, president of Inheritance Publishers, and vice-president of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society. He has written, co-authored, or edited seventy books (most recently, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, *Living Zealously*, *Friends and Lovers: Cultivating Companionship and Intimacy in Marriage*, *Getting Back Into the Race: The Cure for Backsliding*, *Parenting by God’s Promises: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace*, *Living for the Glory of God: An Introduction to Calvinism*, *Meet the Puritans*, *Contagious Christian Living*, *Calvin for Today*, *Developing a Healthy Prayer Life*, and *Taking Hold of God*), and contributed 2,000 articles to Reformed books, journals, periodicals, and encyclopedias. His PhD is in Reformation and Post-Reformation theology from Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia). He is frequently called upon to lecture at seminaries and to speak at Reformed conferences

around the world. He and his wife Mary have been blessed with three children: Calvin, Esther, and Lydia. He blogs at [Doctrine for Life](http://www.doctrineforlife.com).

<https://puritanseminary.org/academics/faculty/joel-beeke/>

Dr. RC Sproul Jr. studied philosophy and literature at Grove City College. While there he published his first book, *Money Matters* (now, revised and expanded as *Biblical Economics*.) After two years in graduate school studying English at Ole Miss he enrolled at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando in 1989. He received an MA in theological studies in 1991. After several years of service on the magazine Dr. Sproul was named editor-in-chief of *Tabletalk* magazine in late 1993, a position he held for eleven years. In 1996 Dr. Sproul moved his young family to rural southwestern Virginia to plant a church and to start the Highlands Study Center, now Highlands Ministries. Dr. Sproul served as senior pastor at Saint Peter Presbyterian Church for five years, before becoming pastor of education there. He published his second book, *Almighty Over All* in 1998. Through Highlands Ministries Dr. Sproul continued to write (serving as editor of Highlands’ magazine, *Every Thought Captive*) and travel around the nation and the world teaching on issues of practical theology, the Bible, apologetics and systematic theology. He received his D. Min degree from Whitefield Theological Seminary in 2001.



In 2010 Dr. Sproul, along with his wife and eight children relocated to Orlando where Dr. Sproul serves as a teaching fellow with Ligonier Ministries. Since 2011, its inaugural year, Dr. Sproul has also served as associate professor of philosophy and apologetics at Reformation Bible College. In 2012 his latest book, *The Call to Wonder- Loving God Like a Child*, was released.

After a long battle with cancer, the wife of Dr. R. C. Sproul, Jr. (Denise Sproul) (Age 46) and mother of eight children, died on Sunday morning, December 18, 2011 in Sanford, Florida. Denise was the daughter in law of the well-known writer, teacher, and pastor R. C. Sproul, Sr., founder of Ligonier Ministries.

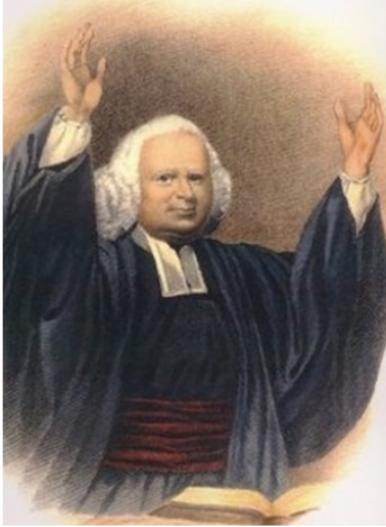
Shannon Macfarlane Sproul, daughter of Dr. R.C. Sproul Jr. (his oldest daughter) and granddaughter of Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr., died on October 4, 2012 at the age of fifteen. She was born with a condition called Lissencephaly, a condition that left her profoundly disabled.



West Suffolk Epistle



George Whitefield - (1714-1770) Methodist Evangelist



George Whitefield was born on December 16, 1714, in Gloucester, England. The youngest of seven children, he was born in the Bell Inn where his father, Thomas, was a wine merchant and innkeeper. His father died when George was two and his widowed mother Elizabeth struggled to provide for her family. Because he thought he would never make much use of his education, at about age 15 George persuaded his mother to let him leave school and work in the inn. However, sitting up late at night, George became a diligent student of the Bible. A visit to his Mother by an Oxford student who worked his way through college encouraged George to pursue a university education. He returned to grammar school to finish his preparation to enter Oxford, losing only about one year of school.

In 1732 at age 17, George entered Pembroke College at Oxford. He was gradually drawn into a group called the "Holy Club" where he met John and Charles Wesley. Charles Wesley loaned him the book, "The Life of God in the Soul of Man." The reading of this book, after a long and painful struggle which even affected him physically, finally resulted in George's conversion in 1735. He said many years later: "I know the place.... Whenever I go to Oxford, I cannot help running to the spot where Jesus Christ first revealed himself to me and gave me the new birth."

Forced to leave school because of poor health, George returned home for nine months of recuperation. Far from idle, his activity attracted the attention of the bishop of Gloucester, who ordained Whitefield as a deacon, and later as a priest, in the Church of England. Whitefield finished his degree at Oxford and on June 20, 1736, Bishop Benson ordained him. The Bishop, placing his hands upon George's head, resulted in George's later declaration that "My heart was melted down and I offered my whole spirit, soul, and body to the service of God's sanctuary."

Whitefield was an astounding preacher from the beginning. Though he was slender in build, he stormed in the pulpit as if he were a giant. Within a year it was said that "his voice startled England like a trumpet blast." At a time when London had a population of less than 700,000, he could hold spellbound 20,000 people at a time at Moorfields and Kennington Common. For thirty-four years his preaching resounded throughout England and America. In his preaching ministry he crossed the Atlantic thirteen times and became known as the 'apostle of the British empire.'

He was a firm Calvinist in his theology yet unrivaled as an aggressive evangelist. Though a clergyman of the Church of England, he cooperated with and had a profound impact on people and churches of many traditions, including Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists. Whitefield, along with the Wesleys, inspired the movement that became known as the Methodists. Whitefield preached more than 18,000 sermons in his lifetime, an average of 500 a year or ten a week. Many of them were given over and over again. Fewer than 90 have survived in any form.

<http://www.ccel.org/w/whitefield/>



West Suffolk Epistle



The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

Chapter 2 - God and the Holy Trinity

1. There is but one, and only one, living and true God. He is self-existent and infinite in His being and His perfections. None but He can comprehend or understand His essence. He is pure spirit, invisible, and without body, parts, or the changeable feelings of men. He alone possesses immortality, and dwells amid the light insufferably bright to mortal men. He never changes. He is great beyond all our conceptions, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty and infinite. He is most holy, wise, free and absolute. All that He does is the out-working of His changeless, righteous will, and for His own glory. He is most loving, gracious, merciful and compassionate. He abounds in goodness and truth. He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin. He rewards those who seek Him diligently. But He hates sin. He will not overlook guilt or spare the guilty, and He is perfectly just in executing judgment.

2. God is all-sufficient, and all life, glory, goodness and blessedness are found in Him and in Him alone. He does not stand in need of any of the creatures that He has made, nor does He derive any part of His glory from them. On the contrary, He manifests His own glory in and by them. He is the fountain-head of all being, and the origin, channel and end of all things. Over all His creatures He is sovereign. He uses them as He pleases, and does for them or to them all that He wills. His sight penetrates to the heart of all things. His knowledge is infinite and infallible. No single thing is to Him at risk or uncertain, for He is not dependent upon created things. In all His decisions, doings and demands He is most holy. Angels and men owe to Him as their creator all worship, service and obedience, and whatever else He may require at their hands.

3. Three divine Persons constitute the Godhead-the Father, the Son (or the Word), and the Holy Spirit. They are one in substance, in power, and in eternity. Each is fully God, and yet the Godhead is one and indivisible. The Father owes His being to none. He is Father to the Son who is eternally begotten of Him. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. These Persons, one infinite and eternal God not to be divided in being, are distinguished in Scripture by their personal nature or in relations within the Godhead, and by the variety of works which they undertake. Their tri-unity (that is, the doctrine of the Trinity) is the essential basis of all our fellowship with God, and of the comfort we derive from our dependence upon Him.

What are some guidelines for leading a church in prayer?

1. Use “we,” not “I.” You’re praying on behalf of everyone in the room, not just yourself.
2. Carefully consider beforehand what you are going to say. Whether you read the prayer, use notes, or have no written aid, give careful thought beforehand to what you are going to say. Ecclesiastes 5:2: ***“Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.”***
3. Use biblical ideas and language. A prayer soaked in the ideas and language of Scripture will best edify the people of God, so use the Bible as a guide as you address God on behalf of the whole church. Keep things concise and to the point. Avoid wordy repetition and rambling. Matthew 6:7: ***“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.”***



West Suffolk Epistle



The Truth About Separation of Church and State

It is a fact of American life nowadays that anytime the Bible, Ten Commandments, or any moral standard based on Scripture arises, the cry that immediately goes up is, "Oh, but that violates the separation of church and state; the First Amendment prohibits religious values in public affairs." *We have heard this rhetoric for decades, but does the First Amendment really say that?* The First Amendment reads thusly:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

Not only are the words "separation of church and state" not found in the First Amendment, **they do not appear in any founding document.** What then does the First Amendment mean?

The U.S. Congressional Records of June 7 through September 25, 1789—the dates in which the Founders framed the First Amendment—clearly demonstrate the Founders' intent. The Founders wanted to ensure that what happened in England did not happen in America, namely, that the federal government would not be allowed to establish a national denomination to the excluding of all others. The records show that in all the discussions and early wordings of the First Amendment, the Founders used the word "religion" interchangeably with the word "denomination." **They had absolutely no intention whatsoever of excluding Biblical principles and religious values in public affairs.**

Just one example of many is Fisher Ames, who, according to the Congressional Record of September 20, 1789, was the man who actually offered the final wording of the First Amendment. In an article in a national magazine dated January 1801, Ames wrote of his concern about all the new textbooks that were appearing. He said that while these are good, the Bible still must never be replaced as the number one textbook in our schools.

Why then, if these books for children must be retained, as they will be, should not the Bible regain the place it once held as a school book? Its morals are pure, its examples captivating and noble.

So, the Bible did not violate Fisher Ames' view of the First Amendment. Several other Founding Fathers, such as Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, John Adams, and George Washington all warned that removing religious and moral principles from the classroom would result in serious social problems. *And this is precisely what has happened in America.*

From where, then, does the phrase "separation of church and state" come? It first appeared in a letter written by Thomas Jefferson in 1801, who was then President. This letter was a reply to the Danbury Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut, who heard a rumor that the Congregationalist denomination was going to be made the national religion and wrote Jefferson in protest. In his reply, Jefferson assured them that they should have no fear of this because:

. . . I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislation should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" [i.e., The First Amendment], thus building a wall of separation between church and state. [The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Memorial Edition (Washington: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association of the United States, 1903), pp. 281-282.]

The context and intent of Jefferson's letter had nothing whatsoever to do with removing the Bible and morality from government, rather it dealt with the original intent of the First Amendment, namely, that there would never be a **national denomination.**

But in spite of these historical facts, in 1962 the phrase "separation of church and state" was ripped completely from its context and intent. On June 25, 1962, in the court case *Engel v. Vitale*, the Supreme Court used that phrase to redefine "church." *For 170 years before this case*, the court defined "church" as being a federally established denomination, but it *now* meant any religious activity performed in public. And as we've seen, this ruling set America on her downward course.

The facts are that the intent of the Founding Fathers was never, *never*, **NEVER** to separate God and government. They believed that God must be at the center of government. Tragically that is not the case today and we see the results. ~ **Dr J.D. Watson – Pastor-Teacher – Grace Bible Church**



West Suffolk Epistle



Does Joel Osteen Not Know, or Does He Not Care? *October 28, 2011*

Here we go again. Joel Osteen is in the news once again, this time for saying that Mormonism is just another form of Christianity. Osteen, pastor of “America’s largest church,” as the media repeat over and over, was speaking to The Washington Times in an interview that covered a variety of issues. It was the quintessential Joel on display.

Speaking to the newspaper on Monday, Osteen said, “I see faith in America at an all-time high.” His comments came just as a major research project detailed a significant loss of vitality in America’s Christian congregations. That loss of vitality can be traced, among other things, to a loss of theological and biblical conviction. Joel, of course, is proof positive that you can build a crowd without building a church. He is not inclined to deal in much theological conviction.

In the interview, he distilled his message in these words: “Part of our core message is that seasons change, and when you believe, if you don’t get bitter, and you don’t get discouraged, you may not change overnight, but you can get peace.”

He also told the newspaper: “People need to be reminded that every day is a gift from God, and bloom where you’re planted and be happy where you are, and to make that choice to get up every day and be grateful.”

That message includes some truth, of course — but it doesn’t even come close to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hell will be filled with people who bloomed where they were planted. On Mormonism, Joel said:

“I believe that [Mormons] are Christians I don’t know if it’s the purest form of Christianity, like I grew up with. But you know what, I know Mormons. I hear Mitt Romney — and I’ve never met him — but I hear him say, ‘I believe Jesus is the son of God,’ ‘I believe he’s my savior,’ and that’s one of the core issues.”

“I’m sure there are other issues that we don’t agree on. But you know, I can say that the Baptists and the Methodists and the Catholics don’t all agree on everything. So that would be my take on it.”

Osteen just stated his belief that Mormons are Christians. He then expressed the thought that Mormonism “might not be the purest form of Christianity, like I grew up with,” but he affirmed Mormon statements that Jesus is the Son of God and that He is Savior.

Evaluating Osteen’s boyhood understanding of Christianity would be a project unto itself, given the shifting theology of his preacher father, the late John Osteen.

The main point of concern in Joel’s latest comment is the lack of any biblical standard of judgment and the total abdication of theological responsibility. He relegates doctrinal disagreements between Christians and Mormons to the status of theological debates between Protestant denominations and then includes Roman Catholicism. There are plenty of issues there, and the issues are not the same when comparing Baptists to Methodists, on the one hand, and Protestants and Roman Catholics, on the other. Comparing any form of Trinitarian orthodoxy with Mormonism is another class of question altogether.

Joel reminded the paper’s staff that he has never attended seminary. This is true, of course, but there are thousands of preachers who never had the opportunity to attend seminary who have a sufficient grasp of and commitment to biblical truth that would prevent such carelessness.

By now, it is clear that Joel Osteen’s carelessness is deliberate and calculated. This is not the first time that he has encountered the question of Mormonism. Back in 2007, he told Chris Wallace of FOX News that Mormons are indeed Christians:

~Continued on Page 10~



West Suffolk Epistle



Does Joel Osteen Not Know, or Does He Not Care? *October 28, 2011*

“Well, in my mind they are. Mitt Romney has said that he believes in Christ as his savior, and that’s what I believe, so, you know, I’m not the one to judge the little details of it. So I believe they are.”

The little details of it? Mormonism does not differ from historic biblical Christianity in only the “little details,” and a faithful Mormon would be the first to point this out. Mormonism begins with a plurality of gods, not with the monotheism of the Bible. Jesus Christ is an exalted man — not the incarnate Word. The list of categorical doctrinal differences continues throughout the entire belief system.

The very essence of Mormonism is the claim that historic Christianity is fundamentally in error, and that true Christianity did not exist on earth from the time of the Apostles until Joseph Smith. Mormonism can hardly be charged with hiding their movement’s teachings — the *Book of Mormon* and the other fundamental texts of the Latter Day Saints are published in plain sight.

In a remarkable exchange with Chris Wallace, Osteen muddied the waters further:

WALLACE: So, for instance, when people start talking about Joseph Smith, the founder of the church, and the golden tablets in upstate New York, and God assumes the shape of a man, do you not get hung up in those theological issues?

OSTEEN: I probably don’t get hung up in them because I haven’t really studied them or thought about them. And you know, I just try to let God be the judge of that. I mean, I don’t know.

Here we face a fundamental dilemma. When Joel Osteen hears a summary of Mormon belief that mentions God assuming “the shape of a man,” does he lack the theological discernment to hear how that differs from biblical Christianity, or does it not concern him? In other words, does Joel not know, or does Joel not care?

In the end, we have to conclude that he does not care enough to know, and that is the greater tragedy for a Christian minister. He doesn’t “get hung up” on doctrinal issues, nor has he “really studied them or thought about them.” His own words indict him.

Evangelical Christians are going to face many questions in this season, and the question of Mormonism is now front and center. It will call upon all of us to do what Joel Osteen proudly has not done — to study and think about these issues. In this political moment, we will have to think carefully and act judiciously without confusing the theological questions. We will need the full wealth of Christian conviction.

We will also need deep doctrinal discernment mixed with urgent spiritual concern. The Latter Day Saints include some of the most wonderful and kind people we will ever meet. They put a great emphasis on character and on the moral values of our common concern. They talk freely and passionately about their own beliefs, including their beliefs concerning Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they put action behind their commitments, sending their young people on mission and fueling a worldwide movement that remains one of the fastest-growing on the planet.

But their beliefs concerning Jesus Christ are not those of historic Christianity, and their understanding of salvation differs radically from the message of the New Testament. It is the responsibility of every Christian — and most certainly every Christian minister — to know this.

Joel Osteen told *The Washington Times* that he is constantly “looking for new ways to influence the culture.” Our culture admires those with low theological commitment and high emphasis on attitude. In Joel Osteen’s case, it is the secular culture that has influenced the minister, and not the minister that is influencing the culture. ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**



West Suffolk Epistle



Ladies Spring Salad Luncheon

On Saturday, April 12th thirteen ladies gathered at the church's parsonage to enjoy a time of sweet fellowship. Everyone brought a salad and/or dessert to share and it will come as no surprise that we had an abundance which could easily have fed an army of hungry men. It was fun to taste each other's favorite recipe, catch up on important events in each other's lives and just get to know one another a little bit better.





West Suffolk Epistle



WEST SUFFOLK BAPTIST CHURCH DOCTRINES OF GRACE BIBLE CONFERENCE

May 2-4, 2014

Speaker: Pastor Brian Russell

Theme: *“Expounding the Glorious Doctrines of Grace”*

Friday Evening (7:00 p.m.) Refreshments provided

Ephesians 1:1-14 *“Blessed with Every Spiritual Blessing
in the Heavens in Christ.”*

Saturday Morning (11:00 a.m.) Lunch will be provided

An Autobiographical Sketch:

*“The God Who Opens and Closes Doors
for His Good Pleasure”*

Sunday Morning (11:00 a.m.)

Ephesians 2:1-10 *“Saved by Grace through Faith”*

Following our Morning Worship Service, everyone is invited to join us for our **First Sunday Fellowship**.

Brian A. Russell was born in South Africa and was converted at the age of seventeen. After working in the gold-mining industry for six years, he studied at the University of South Africa and the Baptist Theological College, Johannesburg, before entering the pastoral ministry in 1962. He has served churches in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Virginia, where he now lives. He and his wife Muriel have three grown children, and he is the author of *Baptism – Sign and Seal of the Covenant of Grace*, *Totally Committed to Christ*, *The Greatest Prayer Ever Prayed* (an exposition of John 17), and *Christ’s Return as King of Kings*.



West Suffolk Epistle

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”

WEST SUFFOLK BAPTIST CHURCH
ASSOCIATION OF REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCHES OF AMERICA

Birthday and Anniversary Corner - May 2014

Francis Carter - 5/2
Patrick Dillard - 5/2
Sarah Hurst - 5/22
Mike Myers - 5/22
John Hurst - 5/30

Ben and Charlene Scofield - 5/25

When Less is More

An old pastor once said he could always tell when a Christian was growing because a growing Christian would always talk more about Christ and less about himself. When a Christian matures in his walk with the Lord, he sees himself getting smaller and smaller until, like the morning star, he gives way to the rising sun.

John the Baptist illustrates that truth. God appointed John to prepare the way for Christ by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. His ministry was wildly successful. The Bible says all the country of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to hear him preach (Mark 1:4-5). But John understood that his ministry wasn't designed to attract attention to himself. He told the crowds, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals" (Mark 1:7). "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Whether you're a person of great or small stature in the eyes of the world, your life and resources have been given to you only so that you can reflect glory to the Lord Jesus Christ and make His praises known. Yield the spotlight to Him in your conversations today so that He can receive more of the glory He so richly deserves. ~
Dr. John MacArthur

Disclaimer

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



West Suffolk Baptist Church

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.
Office: 1001 Kenyon Court, Suffolk, VA 23435; **E-Mail:** pastorscofield@gmail.com
Website: www.westsuffolkbc.com **Phone/Fax:** 757-539-0363
Teaching Pastor: Ben Scofield, pastorscofield@gmail.com
Editor: Walt Lawrence, gwlcf10415@gmail.com

Please submit information to Walt Lawrence by the second Sunday of the 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.