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West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Accepting “No” as God’s Will

I am astonished that, in the light of the clear biblical record, anyone would have the audacity to suggest that it is wrong for the afflicted in body or soul to couch their prayers for deliverance in terms of *“If it be thy will....”* We are told that when affliction comes, God always wills healing, that He has nothing to do with suffering, and that all we must do is claim the answer we seek by faith. We are exhorted to claim God’s yes before He speaks it.

Away with such distortions of biblical faith! They are conceived in the mind of the Tempter, who would seduce us into exchanging faith for magic. No amount of pious verbiage can transform such falsehood into sound doctrine. We must accept the fact that God sometimes says no. Sometimes He calls us to suffer and die even if we want to claim the contrary.

Never did a man pray more earnestly than Christ prayed in Gethsemane. Who will charge Jesus with failure to pray in faith? He put His request before the Father with sweat like blood: *“Take this cup away from me.”* This prayer was straightforward and without ambiguity—Jesus was crying out for relief. He asked for the horribly bitter cup to be removed. Every ounce of His humanity shrank from the cup. He begged the Father to relieve Him of His duty.

But God said no. The way of suffering was the Father’s plan. It was the Father’s will. The cross was not Satan’s idea. The passion of Christ was not the result of human contingency. It was not the accidental contrivance of Caiaphas, Herod, or Pilate. The cup was prepared, delivered, and administered by almighty God.

Jesus qualified His prayer: *“If it is Your will....”* Jesus did not *“name it and claim it.”* He knew His Father well enough to understand that it might not be His will to remove the cup. So the story does not end with the words, *“And the Father repented of the evil He had planned, removed the cup, and Jesus lived happily ever after.”* Such words border on blasphemy. The gospel is not a fairy tale. The Father would not negotiate the cup. Jesus was called to drink it to its last dregs. And He accepted it. *“Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done”* (Luke 22:42).

This *“nevertheless”* was the supreme prayer of faith. The prayer of faith is not a demand that we place on God. It is not a presumption of a granted request. The authentic prayer of faith is one that models Jesus’ prayer. It is always uttered in a spirit of subordination. In all our prayers, we must let God be God. No one tells the Father what to do, not even the Son. Prayers are always to be requests made in humility and submission to the Father’s will.

The prayer of faith is a prayer of trust. The very essence of faith is trust. We trust that God knows what is best. The spirit of trust includes a willingness to do what the Father wants us to do. Christ embodied that kind of trust in Gethsemane. Though the text is not explicit, it is clear that Jesus left the garden with the Father’s answer to His plea. There was no cursing or bitterness. His meat and His drink were to do the Father’s will. Once the Father said no, it was settled. Jesus prepared Himself for the cross. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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The Word of God in the Hands of Men

It was many years ago when my grandmother related to me games that she played as a little girl in the 1880s. One game she mentioned was one that she and her Methodist girlfriends played with their Roman Catholic friends. In a playful jest of the words of the Mass, my grandmother would say, “*Tommy and Johnny went down to the river to play dominoes.*” Here the word *dominoes* was a play on the use of the term *Domine* that occurred so frequently in the Catholic rite of the Mass. The children, of course, were revealing their lack of knowledge of the words of the Mass because they were spoken in Latin.

In a similar vein, those who are interested in the arts of prestidigitation know that all magicians, as they ply their trade, use certain sayings to make their magic come to pass. They will recite certain incantations, such as “*abracadabra,*” “*presto chango,*” and perhaps most famous of all, “*hocus pocus.*” Even today we use “*hocus pocus*” to describe a type of magical art. It is an incantation used for the magician to perform his magic. But from where does the phrase “*hocus pocus*” come?

The origin of it is once again borrowed from people’s misunderstanding of the language used in the Roman Catholic Mass. In the words of institution uttered in Latin in the ancient formula, the statement was recited as follows: “*hoc est corpus meum.*” This phrase is the Latin translation of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper: “*This is my body.*” But in the Mass to the unskilled ear, the supposed miracle of the transformation of the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ were heard under the rubric of language that sounded like “*hocus pocus.*” These kinds of derivations are a direct result of people’s being involved in some kind of drama where the words that are spoken remain unknown to them.

In the Middle Ages, the church was committed to performing the Mass in the ancient tongue of Latin. That tongue was understood by educated people, and particularly by the clergy, but it was not intelligible to the laity. As early as the ninth century, questions were raised about the propriety of keeping the words of God obscured from the layperson by being restricted to Latin. The Bible itself was literally chained to the lecterns of the churches, so that it could not fall into the hands of people who were unskilled in the languages. It was not given to the common person to interpret the Bible for himself or to have it read in the common language of the people. It took centuries for the church to get over this struggle, and it provoked issues of heresy and of persecution. Prior to the sixteenth-century Reformation, among English-speaking people, the work of Tyndale and Wycliffe was brought under the censure of the church because these men dared to translate the Bible into a language other than Latin.

In 1521, the Imperial Diet of Worms ended dramatically when Luther, in the presence of the Holy Roman Emperor, refused to recant of his writing and stated to the assembly gathered: “*Unless I’m convinced by sacred Scripture or by evident reason, I will not recant. For my conscience is held captive by the Word of God. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me.*” With those dramatic words, the Diet exploded in shouts of protest, while Luther’s friends faked a kidnapping, whisked him away from Worms and secreted him to the Wartburg Castle in Eisenach. There for a full year, Luther, disguised as a monk, worked on his project of translating the New Testament into the German language from the original Greek text. Some regard this work of setting forth the Bible in the vernacular as one of the most important contributions that Luther made to the life of the church.



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The Word of God in the Hands of Men - Cont'd

But it was not received with equanimity everywhere. The great renaissance scholar, Erasmus of Rotterdam, whose motto was *ad fontes* (“to the sources”), who was known for his mastery of ancient languages, protested against Luther’s presumption to interpret the Bible into the vernacular. Erasmus did have enough respect for Luther to see that Luther was a world-class philologist in his own right. But he chastened Luther for daring to go against the church in translating the Bible into German. He counseled Luther by saying that if the Bible were to be translated into the common tongue and given to the people for their own reading, it would “*unloose a floodgate of iniquity.*”

Erasmus was convinced that giving the Bible into the hands of the people in their own language would give them a license to turn the Bible into a wax nose to be twisted and shaped and distorted into any inclination or private opinion that the individual could stretch from the Scriptures. Luther affirmed this, that if unskilled people are given the right to read the Scriptures for themselves in their own language, much mischief will occur from it, and people will use the Bible to try to justify the wildest of all possible heresies. On the other hand, Luther was convinced of the perspicuity of Scripture, namely, that its central message of salvation is so clear that even a child can understand it. Luther believed that the salvific words communicated in Scripture are so vitally important that it is worth setting the opportunity for salvation before the people even though some dire consequences might flow from such reading. He responded to Erasmus by saying, “*If a floodgate of iniquity be opened, so be it.*”

In the wake of the translation of the Bible into the common language came the basic principle of private interpretation. That principle of private interpretation was soundly condemned by the Roman Catholic Church in the fourth session of the Council of Trent in the middle of the sixteenth century. But the die was cast, and since that time, the Bible has been translated into thousands of languages, and attempts are afoot to get the Bible translated into every language that can be found anywhere on the face of the earth. The prophetic concerns of Erasmus in many ways have come true with the vast proliferation of denominations, each calling themselves biblical. Yet at the same time, the gospel of salvation in Christ has been made known abroad throughout the world because the Bible has been given in the vernacular and made available to all people. To be sure, private interpretation does not give a license for private distortion. Anyone who presumes to interpret the Bible for himself must assume with that right the awesome responsibility of interpreting it correctly. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**

Not Sparing His Own Son

God loves us regardless of the cost. The cross is proof of that. Consider what God’s love for us has already cost Him: He gave His own beloved Son to die in order to accomplish our salvation. Having already paid so great a price to redeem us, He won’t allow the process to stop short of the goal. And if He has already given His best and dearest on our behalf, why would He withhold anything from us now?

Would God redeem sinners at the cost of His own Son’s blood, then cast those same blood-bought believers aside? Having brought us to salvation at so great a price, would He then withhold any grace from us? Won’t He finish what He started? Romans 8:32 provides us with a clear and emphatic answer: “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*”



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Not Sparing His Own Son - Cont'd

Christ's death on the cross demonstrated His great love for sinners. Furthermore, the massive "*once for all*" (Hebrews 7:27) payment that purchased our redemption was also a profound statement regarding God's commitment to keep it secure.

God gave Christ to die for us "*while we were yet sinners*" (Romans 5:8). He won't turn His back on us now that we are justified. If He didn't spurn us when we were rebellious sinners, He won't cast us aside now that we are His children. "*If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son*" (Romans 5:10), doesn't it seem reasonable that He will do everything necessary to keep us in the fold now that we are reconciled? If He gave us grace to trust Christ in the first place, He will assuredly give grace to keep us from falling away.

Psalm 84:11 says, "*For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.*" God is not stingy with His grace, and the proof of that is seen in the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. "*But he giveth more grace*" (James 4:6, KJV).

God's Plan from Eternity Past

The sacrifice of Christ is eternally bound up in God's love for the elect. Did you know that in eternity past, before God had even begun the work of creation, He promised to redeem the elect? Titus 1:2 says the promise of eternal life was made "*before the world began*" (KJV)—literally, before the beginning of time. So this speaks of a divine promise made before anything was created.

Who made this promise, and with whom was it made? Since it was made before creation commenced, there is only one possible answer: It was a promise made between the triune members of the Godhead. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit promised among themselves to redeem fallen humanity.

The plan of redemption was made not after Adam fell but before the beginning of creation. This is consistent with everything Scripture says about election. The saved are chosen in Christ "*before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians 1:4). God "*called us . . . in Christ Jesus from all eternity*" (2 Timothy 1:9). The eternal kingdom is prepared for them "*from the foundation of the world*" (Matthew 25:34). Christ was foreordained to shed His blood on their behalf "*before the foundation of the world*" (1 Peter 1:20). The names of the elect are written in the Book of Life "*from the foundation of the world*" (Revelation 13:8; 17:8).

This means the plan of redemption is no contingency. It is not Plan B. It is no alternative strategy. It is God's plan, the very purpose for which He created us.

Furthermore, it means that the elect are God's gift of love to His Son. That's why Christ refers to them as "*those whom You have given Me*" (John 17:9, 24; 18:9). The Father has given the elect to Christ as a gift of love, and therefore not one of them will be lost. Both the Father and the Son work together to ensure the fulfillment of their eternal plan of redemption. This further assures the salvation of all the elect, for as Jesus said, "*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. . . . For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day*" (John 6:37, 40).



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Not Sparing His Own Son - Cont'd

So Christ Himself promises to see God's plan of redemption through to the end. Having died as a substitute for those whom the Father gave Him, He promises to see the process through to the final consummation in glory. Likewise, the Father, having already given His Son to die on our behalf, will not now withhold anything necessary to complete our redemption. ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*

Battling Heresy: Athanasius of Alexandria

God often delights to save the most unlikely people, seemingly far beyond the realm of human explanation.

Early in the fourth century, an unlikely convert entered the fold of professing Christendom—the Roman Emperor Constantine.

After accounting a military triumph to God's intervention through the sign of a cross, Constantine declared himself a Christian.

With Constantine openly professing Christ, Christians no longer needed to fear persecution from the Roman authorities. Believers found themselves in an unprecedented season of peace and popularity. Once opposed and oppressed, Christians were now acclaimed and admired.

But the official acceptance of Christianity brought with it significant dangers. Popularity proved to be a greater threat to Christianity than persecution, and the church was weakened significantly.

Attack on the Trinity

Hordes of unregenerate Roman citizens were baptized as believers. Sacred merged with secular, and the immediate result was doctrinal compromise.

In this compromised condition, the church was vulnerable to doctrinal heresy. A particularly tenacious false teaching came from Arius, who argued that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, was no more than a created being.

When this deadly doctrine began to gain a foothold in the churches, a synod convened in Alexandria and judged Arius to be a heretic. Tragically, this public rebuke did little to restrain Arius, who traveled throughout the empire spreading his theological poison.

Despite his outward concern for orthodoxy, Constantine cared more for political unity than theological accuracy. He convened a church council—the Council of Nicaea, one of the most significant gatherings in church history. From across the empire, 318 bishops came together, including a man named Athanasius.



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Battling Heresy: Athanasius of Alexandria - Cont'd

The Council of Nicaea

The Nicene Council examined Arius's teachings and overwhelmingly condemned him as a heretic. After burning Arius's writings, the council drafted a carefully worded statement on the Trinity, which affirmed the divine nature of Christ and denounced Arianism.

Despite the Nicene Council's condemnation of Arius and his followers, Arianism continued to permeate the church. As a means of maintaining political peace, Constantine's advisors urged him to reinstate Arius. Constantine caved in and overturned the council's anathema. He ordered Arius to be restored as a presbyter in Alexandria, the home of Athanasius.

Standing for Orthodoxy

Though Arius died before he could return to his office, the battle over Arius's erroneous doctrine continued. In this pivotal controversy, Athanasius became a preeminent guardian of the deity of Christ and of the triune nature of the Godhead.

In his unyielding opposition to Arianism, Athanasius (ca. 298–373) became labeled the "Father of Orthodoxy" and the "saint of stubbornness." Scholars have judged that he was the greatest theologian of his time.

A Spiritual Upbringing

Athanasius was born of wealthy parents in Alexandria, and as a young man, he received a strong theological education in Alexandria's Catechetical School.

Gregory of Nazianzus commented about Athanasius's youth: "From meditating on every book of the Old and New Testament, with a depth such as none else has applied even to one of them, he grew rich in contemplation, rich in splendor of life."

In his early twenties, Athanasius became the personal assistant to Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria. In this role, Athanasius attended the important synod in Alexandria (321) at which Arius was first condemned, as well as the Council of Nicaea (325). These experiences helped prepare him for the critical theological battles that lay ahead.

When Alexander died, Athanasius succeeded him at the relatively young age of thirty, overseeing the church in Alexandria and all the bishops in Egypt and Libya. Arianism was virtually eradicated from the churches of Egypt under his influence.

When Constantine equivocated on the Nicene Council's conclusions and reinstated Arius as a presbyter in Alexandria (336), he ordered Athanasius to accept Arius back into this position.



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Battling Heresy: Athanasius of Alexandria - Cont'd

But true to his convictions, Athanasius refused. He saw Arius as a heretic, not a brother in Christ. To accept him would be to accept false doctrine. Because of this defiance, Constantine exiled Athanasius to the outer extremity of the Roman Empire, in what is now modern-day Germany.

New Emperor, Old Compromise

After Constantine's death, the Roman Empire was divided among his three sons. Constantius, the second son, controlled the East. After a short time on his throne, Constantius granted Athanasius permission to return to Alexandria to resume his ministry.

But Constantius demanded an official revision of the Nicene Creed concerning the deity of Christ, reflecting Arian beliefs. He wanted the word homoousios, meaning "of the same substance," changed to homoiousios, "of a similar substance." Tragically, many bishops backed Constantius in this demand.

Once again, Athanasius would not budge. He saw Constantius's revision as nothing less than accommodating heresy. The difference between homoousios ("same") and homoiousios ("similar") was only one small "i," but it was the difference between describing Christ as fully divine or as a created being.

Athanasius understood that only a fully divine Savior can reconcile sinners to God. If His substitutionary death was to be of value, Jesus must be fully God. If Jesus is less than God, His saving work at the cross was less than sufficient.

Defending True Doctrine

Athanasius was a prolific writer, and his major works are *On the Incarnation of the Word* and *Discourses Against the Arians*. The first is a presentation of Christ's equality with the Father, while the latter is a polemic against the followers of Arius.

On the Incarnation of the Word teaches the full deity of Christ. Athanasius stressed that redemption was accomplished because Christ was fully God, not a mere creature.

Athanasius understood that, by His death, "Christ restored to humanity what was lost through Adam's disobedience." Christ's sacrificial death, which Athanasius characterized as "substitutionary," was a complete triumph.

Discourses Against the Arians is considered Athanasius's polemical masterpiece against Arianism. Athanasius challenged Arius by expounding the eternity of the Son. The natures of the Father and of the Son are identical, he said—both are eternal.

Costly Obedience

Athanasius paid a great price for the truth he cherished so deeply. During his tenure as bishop of Alexandria, he was sent into exile five times by the Roman authorities. He spent seventeen of his forty-five years as bishop in exile from Alexandria.



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Battling Heresy: Athanasius of Alexandria - Cont'd

Though his steadfastness and his faithful flock, the homoousios position eventually prevailed in the ongoing debates in the church.

Despite this adversity, Athanasius maintained his firm stance for the Christian faith, especially the doctrine of Christ's deity—to the end.

Soldiers of Christ, Arise

When the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith were under siege, Athanasius held tenaciously to biblical fidelity. This African Father faithfully guarded the high ground of Christian truth at a time when others retreated amid rising persecution.

The need is the same in this hour of history. We must not shy away from doctrinal disputes that strike against the very heart of the gospel. We must not flinch in the face of divisive attacks. We must lift high the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Athanasius modeled, we must hold fast to the true nature of Christ—truly God and truly man. ~ *Dr. Steven J. Lawson - Adapted from Pillars of Grace by Dr. Steven Lawson (Reformation Trust, 2016).*

Understanding Your Calling

"I pray that . . . you may know what is the hope of [God's] calling" (Ephesians 1:18).

The hope of your calling is grounded in God's promises and in Christ's accomplishments.

In Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul proclaims the blessings of our salvation. In verse 18 he prays that we will comprehend those great truths, which he summarizes in the phrase "*the hope of His calling.*"

"*Calling*" here refers to God's effectual calling—the calling that redeems the soul. Scripture speaks of two kinds of calling: the gospel or general call and the effectual or specific call. The gospel call is given by men and is a universal call to repent and trust Christ for salvation (e.g., Matthew 28:19; Acts 17:30-31). It goes out to all sinners but not all who hear it respond in faith.

The effectual call is given by God only to the elect. By it He speaks to the soul, grants saving faith, and ushers elect sinners into salvation (John 6:37-44, 65; Acts 2:39). All who receive it respond in faith.

The hope that your effectual calling instills is grounded in God's promises and Christ's accomplishments (1 Peter 1:3), and is characterized by confidently expecting yet patiently waiting for those promises to be fulfilled. It is your hope of final glorification and of sharing God's glory when Christ returns (Colossians 3:4). It is a source of strength and stability amid the trials of life (1 Peter 3:14-15). Consequently it should fill you with joy (Romans 5:2) and motivate you to godly living (1 John 3:3).

As you face this new day, do so with the confidence that you are one of God's elect. He called you to Himself and will hold you there no matter what circumstances you face. Nothing can separate you from His love (Romans 8:38-39)! ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*



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Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner - February 2020

Birthdays

*Savanna W. (4)
Jacob David K. (24)*

Anniversary

*Jonathan and April F. (5)
Daniel and Diana K. (11)
Mike and Rose M. (17)*

The Peril of Marriage and Family

Our generation is watching the death of marriage and the family as we know it. Among the many factors contributing to its destruction are immorality, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, abortion, sterilization, women's liberation, delinquency, and sexual rebellion. All those things are like strands in a cord that is strangling the family.

There are many opinions about the restructuring of the family. Some sociologists say marriages need to change. They say we need "open marriages" or "non-marriages" and that it really doesn't matter whether marriages continue as they have in the past. People are groping, without any base of authority, to try to find out how to make meaningful relationships in a disintegrating society.

The Preservation of Family and Marriage

It's time for Christians to reiterate the divine pattern. Our marriages and families should demonstrate a way of living that is rewarding, meaningful, and fulfilling. That divine pattern should be evident to the world as it looks at Christian marriages and families. Unfortunately, the world's problem of divorce has also become a problem of the church. But God has the divine standard that can make marriage and the family what they ought to be. ~ *Excerpt from The Fulfilled Family by Dr. John MacArthur*



**West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership**

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Office: 1001 Kenyon Court, Suffolk, VA 23435

E-Mail: pastorscofield@gmail.com

Website: www.westsuffolkbcc.com Phone/Fax: 757-539-0363

Teaching Pastor/Elder: Pastor Ben Scofield

Teaching Elders: Scott Thomas and Mike Prince

Deacons: Marlin Halsey, John McPhatter and John Hurst

Editor: Walt Lawrence, gwlcf10415@gmail.com

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.

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