



Volume 8 Issue 6

West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



June 2021

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Women Pastors, Women Preachers, and the Looming Test of the Southern Baptist Convention

"Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." That was the message the prophet Elijah heard from his servant. Then, "And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain."

That's the way issues often arise. At first, there is only a small cloud. Soon thereafter, here comes the down-pour. Well, here it comes.

The issue of women serving as pastors and preachers in churches roiled the Southern Baptist Convention from the 1970s until the Conservative Resurgence in the Convention clarified the question conclusively in the Baptist Faith & Message revision of 2000. There never was a moment when more than a handful of women served as pastors of SBC churches, but the mainline Protestant denominations were rushing headlong into the ordination of women as pastors and (Episcopal) priests, driven by two major energies — *first*, the demands of second wave feminism and, *second*, the impulses unleashed by liberation theology. In both cases, the main obstacle was the Bible, but, already compromised by theological liberalism, these denominations deployed revisionist arguments to defuse any argument from Scripture. The strategies of biblical subversion also took two basic forms. The argument was proffered that either the Bible was misread by Christians for nearly 2,000 years or the Bible is just hopelessly mired in patriarchy and oppression and the biblical authors were flat wrong.

Usually, the arguments went together. Comparing the Apostle Paul to the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale (a preacher of little theology but much positive thinking), Senator Adlai Stevenson famously quipped, "I find Saint Paul appealing and Saint Peale appalling." Well, the theological liberals and feminists found St. Paul appalling. The LGBTQ theorists are in full agreement.

The result has been the feminization of liberal Protestantism. Put bluntly, there are just not that many males left. Actually, there are not many people left in those churches. Liberal theology is the kiss of death for any church or denomination. Little remains but social justice activism and deferred maintenance.

Among leftward-leaning evangelicals, the arguments of the day were slightly more tame, but they arrived at the same conclusion — the church has been wrong in restricting the teaching office of the church to men. Women must be called and ordained and placed in pulpits and invested with full and equal recognition of teaching authority. The small but influential left wing of the Southern Baptist Convention was enthusiastic about advancing women as pastors back in the 1970s, and by the 1980s the establishment "moderates" in the SBC became theoretically committed to women as pastors. The moderates had a great deal to say about their support for women in the pastorate, but the vast majority of their churches were (and remain) adamantly certain that their pastor should be a man. Prior to the Conservative Resurgence, the seminaries were highly supportive of women studying for the pastorate, but relatively few churches were actually open to the idea.



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In truth, the issue of women serving as pastors fueled the Conservative Resurgence in the SBC. The question was instantly clarifying. The divide over women serving in the pastorate served as a signal of the deeper divide over the authority and interpretation of the Bible. Simply put, the only way to affirm women serving in the pastoral role is to reject the authority and sufficiency of biblical texts such as 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. There is more to the picture, but not less. Furthermore, the Christian church in virtually every tradition through nearly two millennia in almost every place on earth has understood these texts clearly. In most churches around the world, there is no question about these texts even now. Furthermore, there is the testimony of God-given differences in the roles of men and women in the church and in the home throughout the Bible. The pattern of revealed truth is not hard to follow.

Southern Baptists codified the convictional issues as part of our confession of faith in the year 2000. The Baptist Faith & Message was revised to make clear that, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture." Again, the statement is quite clear, and that statement is part of the confessional foundation that allows Southern Baptist churches to cooperate in mission and ministry. Every single seminary professor teaching in our six seminaries is obligated to that teaching, and had better be clear about it. The same is true for every missionary and worker with the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board — and for every SBC convention work. The BF&M is the summary of Baptist beliefs that define what it means to be a cooperating Southern Baptist and a church "in friendly cooperation with" the Convention.

The Constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention includes this crucial statement: "The Convention will only deem a church to be in friendly cooperation with the Convention, and sympathetic with its purposes and work (i.e., a 'cooperating' church as that term is used in the Convention's governing documents) which (1) Has a faith and practice which closely identifies with the Convention's adopted statement of faith." There are two additional criteria listed, but the first criterion is agreement with the convictions of the Convention.

More recently, less than twenty years after that clear statement, some Southern Baptists have sought to distinguish between the office of pastor and the act of preaching, thus allowing women to preach to the congregation, but arguing that the role of "senior pastor" is still reserved for men. A similar argument has advanced among some Presbyterians, who argue that a woman should be allowed to perform any act of ministry open to an unordained man. I honestly doubt that the argument works even for Presbyterians, but I will have to leave the Presbyterian argument to Presbyterians. In any event, the argument certainly does not work for Baptists for two glaring reasons. **First**, we have no theology of an ordained ministry. We have no theological basis for making ordination the determinative issue in anything. You will find no evidence of an ordination theology in any historic Baptist confession of faith. You will also find no reference to a "senior" pastor. A pastor is a pastor and "the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

The **second** reason is just as simple. In Baptist ecclesiology, office and function are precisely the same thing. Question: Who is your preacher? Answer: Whoever is doing the preaching. Baptists rightly resist any distinction between office and function, believing such a distinction to be foreign to the New Testament.



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Even more recently, some churches have started designating (and even ordaining) women as pastors. In some cases, it is not certain what this means, and whether it invokes the teaching office. In other cases, it clearly does mean a woman in the teaching office. This past week, Saddleback Community Church in California ordained three women as pastors. In a development described by the church as "historic," the church posted a photograph of the ordinations with the text: "Saddleback Church Pastor Rick Warren and others pray over the first three women the church has ordained as pastors."

Given just that limited text, it would be difficult to know exactly what the church meant by the action, but it would certainly include the identification of the three women as pastors. Since each was already on the church ministry staff, the news would only make sense if the ordinations mean something quite significant.

The full picture comes into focus when one of the women, identified as Pastor Cynthia Petty, explained in an interview format that "this change in philosophy for 'women in ministry' was revolutionary." She continued: "I was honored and felt extremely humbled. And the thing I believe meant the most to me was how this would be groundbreaking for all the younger women ministers on staff who really did have the desire or dream to be a pastor one day!" Later in the document, she suggested that "the role of women in the church has evolved" and concluded: "This is a new day for women in ministry and I am honored and blessed to help carry the mantle of being a Pastor and have the title as NextGen Ministries pastor at Saddleback Church!"

In other words, there is no doubt that these three women are considered to serve as pastors and in the teaching office. Southern Baptists are clear, through the Baptist Faith & Message, that this is contrary to Scripture.

Southern Baptists are now, yet again, at a moment of decision. This is no longer a point of tension and debate. These moves represent an attempt to redefine and reformulate the convictional foundation of Southern Baptist faith and cooperative ministry. The theological issues have not changed since the year 2000 when Southern Baptists spoke clearly and precisely in the Baptist Faith & Message. More importantly, the Holy Scriptures have not changed and cannot change.

The convictions of the Baptist Faith & Message — all of them — describe the doctrinal basis for our Convention and for our cooperation together. Any use of the term "pastor" for women in church leadership is, at best, unwise and confusing. In an increasing number of cases, it is now clear that some churches, including quite large and well-known churches, are placing women in the office of pastor in direct violation of our confession of faith. Further, a number of churches that are at least listed as Southern Baptist welcomed and advertised women preaching in the morning service.

The Southern Baptist Convention must not be unclear about our theological convictions and the ground of our cooperation. We cannot afford to be. Attempts to deny the issue will not work. Right now, Southern Baptists will decide if we will redefine the doctrine of the Southern Baptist Convention. I do not believe that Southern Baptists will allow this to happen. I do not believe that Southern Baptists will retreat from the truth.

But, this is no longer a cloud the size of a hand. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. - President of the Southern Baptist Seminary*



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Searching for the Truth

Whenever people ask me what I do for a living, I respond by telling them I am a pastor. When I tell them I am a pastor, people appear to be instantly filled with a range of emotions as they try to figure out how to respond. Depending on their spiritual state and their relationship to Christ and the church, their responses range from fear to comfort, from anxiety to delight. Some people attempt to change the subject as quickly as possible, some want to tell me all about their spiritual journey, some want to unload all their burdens, some talk about why they left the church, and others rejoice in our common faith in Christ. But more often than not, when I tell people I'm a pastor, they have questions—questions about our church, about what I believe, about the Bible, God, and the afterlife. All people have questions. We are inquisitive by nature. And in this age of pluralism, atheism, and skepticism, many people are searching for truth and the answers to life's ultimate questions.

In some ways, pastors have more opportunities than other Christians to proclaim and explain the gospel and do the work of an evangelist and apologist. It is one of the joys of being a pastor. By the very nature of what we do, pastors are theologians and apologists. But in truth, every Christian is a theologian and an apologist. The question for all of us is whether we are good theologians and apologists and whether we are serious students of Scripture and the theology and answers that come from Scripture. Every Christian is called to be ready to give an answer for the hope that's within us, as Peter commands us, and never to forget that we are to give our answers with "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

As we do our good works before the watching world—not to be seen by men in order to get glory for ourselves, but so that the world might see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven—people will naturally ask us why we do all that we do, why we believe what we believe, and why we hold to the hope that is within us. And when they do, we must not be afraid, for Christ has promised that the Holy Spirit is with us to give us the courage and compassion to speak the truth in love. For this is one of the chief ways we shine as lights in the darkness of the world, knowing that people can only see the light if the Holy Spirit opens their eyes, expels the darkness, regenerates their hearts, and makes them alive to the light of the glory of Jesus Christ. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons**

A Time for Confidence

Paul was likely one of the most intelligent people to have ever lived. He certainly is one of the best writers. He was extremely ambitious. He knew adversity, yet he persevered. If anyone "thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh," Paul tells us, "*I have more*" (Philippians 3:4).

Yet, Paul realizes that "*whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ*" (v. 7). He counts all his accomplishments, all his strivings after righteousness, as "*rubbish*," a polite word for "*dung*." All of Paul's abilities and accomplishments simply serve to underscore his utter inability to achieve righteousness.

Instead of putting his confidence in the flesh, Paul learned to put his confidence in Christ and in the gospel. Paul wanted to be found in Christ. He writes, "*That I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith*" (v. 9).



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A Time for Confidence

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The theologian Francis Turretin expresses it this way:

God grant that, dismissing a vain confidence in our own merit, we may rest in the most perfect merit of Christ alone and so keep faithful in him and fight the good fight even unto the end that we might receive the crown of righteousness; due not to our merit, but most graciously promised to us from the heavenly rewarder.

Johnny Cash wrote a novel on the life of the Apostle Paul. Yes, one of country music's icons and one of American music's legends wrote a biography of Paul. Cash called it *The Man in White*, and it is a piece of genius. The "man in white" is actually not Paul. It's Christ. Therein lies Cash's genius. (Similarly, Augustine is not the main character in his autobiographical *Confessions*. God is.) Paul is not the main character in Cash's biography. He's the prominent and predominant character as the pages unfold. But all along, we get the sense that there is far more to the story than what we are seeing on the page. Behind the scenes of Paul's life, there is One at work, orchestrating all the details to one desired end and one certain outcome.

Paul knew he had to put his confidence in the gospel, because nothing else can turn the human heart and nothing else solves the human dilemma. People think the human dilemma is many things. Some say it's poverty or the unjust distribution of resources and wealth. Some say it's war and our penchant for war. Some simply think the human dilemma is internal and psychological. As R.C. Sproul has often said, "*The human dilemma is this: God is holy, and we are not. God is righteous, and we are not.*" Our problem is not lack or abundance of wealth or resources. Our problem is not that we are a few degrees short of finding utopia. Our problem is the wrath of a holy God. No amount of righteousness that we might produce can solve that dilemma. Paul testifies to only one solution: the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ.

When we think of Luther's main doctrine, we think of justification by faith alone. That doctrine hinges upon one word. In fact, the entire Reformation and the protest the Reformers launched against the Roman Catholic Church could very well be summed up in this one word: **imputation**. The doctrine of imputation teaches that our sin, which cuts us off and alienates us from a holy God, gets imputed to Christ. Christ paid the penalty for our sin, and so our sins are forgiven. The doctrine of imputation also teaches that Christ's righteousness gets imputed to us. If Christ's work only accomplished the forgiveness of sins, we would be right back to where we were in the garden before Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Christ's work overcame the curse and restored "*Paradise lost.*" Christ's work also leads to "*Paradise regained.*" We now stand in the very presence of God clothed in Christ's righteousness. The "Man in white" took our filthy rags and gave us His white, pure, and righteous robe. Paul says it plainly in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "*He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God.*"

Theologians refer to Christ's work in terms of His active obedience and His passive obedience. In His passive obedience, He paid the penalty for sin; He atoned for sin. In His active righteousness, He earned righteousness on our behalf. No other message and no other means can save us or deliver us. Paul spent decades and piled effort upon effort in attempts to white-knuckle his way to God. All to no avail. Then, on the road to Damascus, Saul came to an end as Christ, "the Man in white," brought Paul to Himself.



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A Time for Confidence *Continued from Page 5*

Paul knew firsthand the power of the gospel. Not a day went by that he did not rejoice in what God had done for him in Christ.

The brothers John and Charles Wesley tried white-knuckling their way into heaven. They even went to a faraway land as missionaries in a futile attempt to achieve salvation. Then, independently but within a few days of each other, John and Charles were brought to Christ. John was convicted as he stood outside the Aldersgate Meetinghouse in London and heard Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on Romans being read. Charles was convicted as he was reading Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on Galatians. They decided they would no longer celebrate or mark their earthly birthdays. Instead, they would celebrate the occasion of their conversions.

To mark his first new birth birthday, Charles wrote a hymn, "And Can It Be," a hymn to the mystery and wonder of salvation. In one of the stanzas, he declares:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

Jessica Buchanan was an aid worker in the lawless lands of Somalia. She worked with a Danish charity, teaching children how to avoid landmines. In October 2011, she was kidnapped by a band of Somali pirates armed with AK-47s. She was held for ninety-three days in the wide open, through the rainy season. Over that time, she became malnourished and began to suffer greatly from a kidney infection. Her captors kept her alive, but barely. Negotiations were stalled. She had lost all hope. In the middle of the night on January 25, 2012, she woke to a sudden and violent eruption of gunfire. She thought a rival gang had engaged her captors in a battle. She buried her head in her hands, thinking she would surely die. Then she felt a hand on her shoulder and heard someone call her name—"Jessica."

And she heard it in an American accent.

Under the cover of night, a detachment from U.S. Navy SEAL Team Six parachuted in and attacked the camp. All of the pirates were killed. Jessica was unharmed. The sailors picked her up and carried her out of the camp and to the designated pickup zone. The SEALs then made a circle around her and waited until the helicopter arrived. They loaded her onto the helicopter and she was carried off to safety. As the helicopter lifted off, one of the SEALs handed her an American flag.

Jessica Buchanan contributed nothing to her release from her captors. The SEALs did it all. And when they rescued her, literally from the pit of death, they gave her back her identity. They gave her back her freedom.



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A Time for Confidence *Continued from Page 6*

Her story is a picture of this stanza from Charles Wesley's hymn. It is a hymn commemorating a prison break. The prisoner could do nothing. This prison break was possible only through the work of Christ. So Charles Wesley's hymn declares:

*Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
alive in Him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine.*

The quickening ray is able to penetrate the darkest of dungeons. It penetrated the Praetorian Guard and even the household of Nero.

In the middle of July 64, Rome burned. Nero likely caused the fire. He had ambitious plans to rebuild Rome, but there were current buildings in his way. The belief of historians is that Nero's underlings set the fire to help speed along his revitalization plans. The fire, however, spread out of control. It burned for a week and may have consumed as much as 70 percent of the city.

Fingers started pointing at Nero. The Roman historian Tacitus tells us that to shift the blame off of himself, Nero fixed the blame on Christians. An intense season of persecution ensued. Tacitus further informs us that Nero used Christians as living torches to illumine his gardens at night so he could be entertained by chariot races. Nero's cruelty knew no bounds.

The persecution he unleashed lasted until the end of his reign in AD 68. Sometime between 64 and 68, Nero handed down the order for Paul to be rearrested and for Peter to be arrested. Both were executed before Nero's death. This is the cultural backdrop for the growth of the church and for the New Testament writings.

Rome had two designations for the religions it encountered across its spreading empire. One of those designations was *religio licita*, which means "legal religion." The other was *superstitio illicita*, which means "illegal superstition." The word superstition reveals how contemptuous Rome found these practices to be. For the most part, those people groups that Rome overtook were polytheists. This presented no problems to Rome. This simply meant more gods to add to the Roman pantheon. Most of the religions that came into the empire were dubbed *religio licita*. They had the stamp of approval of Rome and could be practiced freely. Judaism was granted *religio licita* status primarily because Jews didn't tend to proselytize a great deal. But from its beginnings, Christianity was designated a *superstitio illicita*.

As a consequence, Christians were literally enemies of the state—marginalized, ostracized, and persecuted. They could be killed with impunity. To be a Christian was to identify with a group of people who were worthy of nothing but shame and scorn. To the best Romans, Christians were seen as worthy of sympathy for their primitive ways. To the worst Romans, the death of Christians could provide entertainment. Ridding Christians from the empire would be the best possible outcome.

Tacitus refers to Christianity with the designation *superstitio illicita* and testifies to the hatred the Roman populace had for Christians.



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A Time for Confidence *Continued from Page 7*

This despite the fact that Christians in these early centuries lived exemplary lives. Early apologists such as Athenagoras and Justin Martyr testify to the lives Christians lived. They promoted virtue. They honored the emperor. They had a work ethic that set them apart. Paul admonished servants to work “*as for the Lord*” (Colossians 3:23). Christians had loving families that showed genuine concern for each other. Yet, they were seen to be a criminal element and enemies of the state. They were hated—not because of their behavior, for their behavior was laudatory. If only all Romans lived like the Christians. They were hated for their beliefs. They were hated for their belief in Christ and in the gospel. Ultimately, Christians were hated because their beliefs were different, and their beliefs challenged the status quo.

Christus, their leader, was hated also, and He was killed on a cross under Pontius Pilate. His followers were all guilty—simply for being Christians. In the midst of all of this, we have Paul’s testimony in Philippians to the power of the gospel.

There is power in the gospel. And there is every reason for us to put our confidence in the gospel. In fact, we’re obligated to. We’re obligated to proclaim this Word. ~ *Dr. Stephen J. Nichols*

Reassurance in the Midst of Trials

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12).

We can be certain of God’s love for us, no matter how unexpected or difficult any trial might be.

Reassuring words are vital as we strive to deal in a godly fashion with trials and sufferings in our Christian lives. In today’s verse, Peter opens with a pastoral term (“beloved”) that conveys tenderness, love, and concern for his audience. It reinforces in a single word the concepts of fervent love for one another and love that covers sin (1 Peter 4:8). Such love is a welcome reality to lean on whenever anyone is undergoing suffering or persecution.

Trials can easily tempt us to be discouraged and doubt God’s love. That likely was happening to believers in Peter’s time. For example, the emperor Nero coated many, including children, in pitch and used them as human torches. With such cruel persecution going on, we can see why Peter wrote to fellow Christians—which includes us—to reassure them of God’s love.

Peter’s expression “*fiery ordeal*,” which can refer to many different types of difficulties, provides reassurance that troubles and trials come for a purpose. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, “*fiery*” referred to a smelting furnace that refined metals of their foreign, unwanted elements. That process is pictured in verses such as Psalm 66:10, “*For Thou hast tried us, O God; Thou hast refined us as silver is refined.*” So “*fiery ordeal*” represents the various sufferings God allows in our lives to purify us.

Peter closes by assuring us that trials are not out of the ordinary, or “*some strange thing.*” We should not be surprised at them as if each was some bizarre occurrence, coming at us simply by chance. Trials, therefore, should be seen as part of life. They might catch us off guard at first, but we can confidently deal with them, knowing that God’s loving care for us never fails. ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

If you have a June birthday or anniversary that is not posted here or is listed in error, please e-mail Walt at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner June 2021

Birthdays

Gene A. (6)
Mike P. (27)

Anniversaries

Brian and Muriel R. (7)
Ben and Carrie P. (23)
Scott and Ruth T. (25)

Discerning the Times

Predictions about the future return of Jesus have spawned so many bizarre distortions of religion that we have witnessed a severe overreaction among many Christians to our future hope. Some of us live as if Jesus Christ is not coming back. We gild the past and try to freeze the present. But the present is made crucial because of the future. It is because Jesus is coming back that we know that what we are doing in the present counts.

Martin Luther thought Jesus was coming back in his day. Jonathan Edwards thought He was near in the eighteenth century. Both of these titans were wrong. Yet the time of His return is years closer than it was in Luther's day. Each day that passes makes the return of Jesus closer. It may well be very soon.

When Jesus comes, I want to be ready. I want to be like Elizabeth and Mary, like Simeon and Anna, people who were ready and watching for the appearance of Christ, people who are vigilant, people who watch for the signs of the times and have a hope that will not embarrass them. They long for the vindication of Christ. They yearn for the triumph of His kingdom. They labor with the certain knowledge that their labor is not in vain. As you labor today in behalf of the kingdom, remember that your work is not in vain. ~ **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 its leadership.