



Volume 9 Issue 4

West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



April 2022

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

A Renewed Mind, a Transformed Life

Did you know that Romans 12:2 is regularly one of the most shared Bible verses across the entire internet?

If you have been familiar with Dr. R.C. Sproul's ministry for some time, it wouldn't surprise you to learn that Romans 12:2 is a frequently discussed verse at Ligonier as we think through new ways to serve Christians who are pursuing renewed minds. When he named Ligonier's daily radio broadcast in 1994, Dr. Sproul turned to Romans 12:2 to describe the broadcast's purpose: "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*" From this verse, our farthest-reaching ministry initiative, *Renewing Your Mind*, was launched. Dr. Sproul explains:

God gives us the revelation of sacred Scripture in order for us to have our minds changed so we begin to think like Jesus. Sanctification and spiritual growth [are] all about this. If you just have it in your mind and you don't have it in your heart, you don't have it. But you can't have it in your heart without first having it in your mind. We want to have a mind informed by the Word of God.

In another exhortation from his classic book, *The Holiness of God*, Dr. Sproul wrote:

The key method Paul underscores as the means to the transformed life is by the "renewal of the mind." This means nothing more and nothing less than education. Serious education. In-depth education. Disciplined education in the things of God. It calls for a mastery of the Word of God. We need to be people whose lives have changed because our minds have changed.

There can be a temptation for some Christians to take a verse like Romans 12:2 and turn it into a "Just Do It" Nike-style battle cry of transformational sanctification divorced from the previous eleven chapters penned by the Apostle Paul. Yet the imperative of Romans 12:2 flows from the "*mercies of God*" outlined in Romans 3:21–12:1. This undeserved favor for redeemed sinners, given through the grace of God in Christ, provokes an outpouring of gratitude and a life of joyful duty.

Romans 12:2 is a vital hinge on the door of biblical truth. On one side, we have the breathtaking vista of doxology found in Romans 11:36: "*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*" On the other side of the door, in Romans 12:3–21, we have flesh-and-blood illustrations of godliness. The character of the Christian is marked by kingdom-minded, humble service. The triumphant indicative of the gospel leads to new life marked by a new pursuit for the mind of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15). Merely imparting information to a human mind is insufficient. From interactions with the most learned scholars of his day in Israel and Greece—and even from reflecting on his own life before conversion—Paul knew that knowledge divorced from love puffs up. To be sure, the gospel is good news about Jesus. But God's Word also explains how the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit makes that news effective in our lives as we repent of sin and believe the truth as it is found in Jesus.



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Romans 12:2 also stands in stark contrast to the truth suppression of Romans 1:18–32. Unsurprisingly, the darkened mind continually shifts the boundaries of ethical norms and slips further into darkness. Along the way, unbelief clamors for everyone’s approval, enlisting public shaming and legal force in its cause. No one can deny this is happening everywhere. The treasonous revolution against the Creator is in full swing. Self-appointed, self-determined rights in the pursuit of dignity and liberty supposedly trump any outside influence, wisdom, or authority. Lost is the truth that men and women are image bearers of God, created in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Perhaps the Word of God has something to say about how we ought to live? The painful tragedy of the darkened mind is evident as those we dearly love self-destruct in sinful labyrinths of their own making. We grieve when righteousness is cast aside because of the harm it can mean for our families and our neighbors (Psalm 119:136). Through tearful pleas, we warn that their feet will slip in due time (Deuteronomy 32:35).

Dr. Sinclair Ferguson explains further the relationship between the gospel and godliness:

Jesus wants His disciples to understand the significance of what He came to do for them, and then to make connections between what He has done and what they are to do. Understanding, the key to transformed Christian living, lies here—not primarily in our affections, or our emotions, or our instincts, or even our will. Christ will gradually transform all these. But He does so through our understanding of the gospel. As its truth affects the way we think, it begins to change the way we feel; that in turn affects what we want, and the way we behave. Thus the gospel fuels the way we live. This is the principle enunciated in Romans 12:1–2. The transformation of our lives takes place by means of the renewal of our minds.

Most of all, the renewed mind is marked by a reliance on the Bible, the only infallible rule for faith and practice. It is sufficient. Through the light of Scripture, we begin to understand God’s holy character and realize our sinfulness—learning all that was lost in Eden, and discovering why we long to return from exile to the Father’s fellowship. That leads us to turn in repentance and look with joy to the redemption found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peace with God is now possible (Romans 5:1). Rejoice! Being found in Christ and living by His revealed Word brings true human dignity and liberty. A renewed mind leads to a transformed life. ~ **Chris Larson - President and Chief Executive Officer of Ligonier Ministries. Chris joined Ligonier in 2004, and he directs and leads all strategic outreach initiatives and oversees daily ministry operations.**

Faithful Vigilance

Paul warned the elders of the church in Ephesus about the critical need for them to be vigilant: “*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert . . .*” (Acts 20:28–31). This Apostolic warning was not just for the Ephesian church; it is a warning that is necessary for every church in every age.



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Faithful Vigilance *Continued from Page 2*

Paul's warning was taken very seriously by many churches and ministers in the controversy between fundamentalists and liberals in the 1920s. Fundamentalists seeing their churches and schools deserting historic Christianity viewed liberals as devious, deceptive, even demonic. Dr. J. Gresham Machen, in the most valuable and enduring critique of liberalism written in the 1920s, *Christianity and Liberalism*, concluded that Christianity was one religion and liberalism was quite another.

While Dr. Machen's analysis was accurate and presented in a temperate manner, many in the churches of his day did not accept it. Why was that, and what can we learn in our day about being vigilant in defending and promoting biblical Christianity?

The Mind of Liberalism

In the first place, we should try to understand how the liberals saw themselves and how they communicated their convictions to others. Liberals insisted that they were evangelical Christians. They believed that they did hold to the essentials of the Christian faith. They insisted, affirming the language of the Auburn Affirmation of 1924, that they held to basic Christian doctrines and only rejected some of the theories that fundamentalists used to elaborate those doctrines. For instance, they believed that Jesus was God with them, but not in the virgin birth. The liberals sincerely believed that they alone would save Christianity in the modern world by making it more relevant. As such, they were active missionaries for their cause.

Dr. Machen was right when he stated of the liberals:

By the equivocal use of traditional phrases, by the representation of differences of opinion as though they were only differences about the interpretation of the Bible, entrance into the Church was secured for those who are hostile to the very foundations of the faith. But the liberals denied such charges, and by using ambiguous language, they persuaded many that they were not as bad as their critics claimed.

The controversy between liberals and fundamentalists was not only about truth for Dr. Machen, it was about ethics. The liberals were not straightforward or honorable in making their beliefs clear. He wrote that "honesty is being relinquished in wholesale fashion by the liberal party in many ecclesiastical bodies today." They had promised in their ordination vows to uphold doctrines that they did not believe.

The Conservative Mind

Dr. Machen believed that the majority of church members in his day were basically conservative. They did not want extensive changes in the doctrine or life of their churches. They were somewhat anxious about where the liberals wanted to take the church. However, they tended to be optimistic about the future and were concerned about criticism of liberalism that seemed too negative or strident.

The leadership of the conservative wing of the church did not present a united front. While the staunch conservatives like Dr. Machen were very alarmed and critical of the liberals, other moderate conservatives argued that too much negativity and divisiveness would undermine the mission of the church. Conservative church members often did not know whom to believe or follow.



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Faithful Vigilance *Continued from Page 3*

The division of opinion among conservative leaders and the optimism of many conservatives disposed them to shy away from a fight. As early as 1915, Dr. Machen saw the potential danger of this situation: *“The mass of the Church here is still conservative—but conservative in an ignorant, non-polemic, sweetness-and-light kind of way which is just meat for the wolves. I do not mean to use harsh phrases in a harsh way, and my language must be understood to be biblical.”* As Paul had warned the Ephesian elders about wolves attacking the sheep of the church, so Dr. Machen worried that the sheep of the church in his day were very vulnerable to liberal wolves.

The Confessionalist Mind

While Dr. Machen was often seen as the greatest intellectual leader of the fundamentalist movement, he was not entirely comfortable with the fundamentalist movement. He did not believe that it was enough to defend just five fundamentals of the faith. He believed that fundamentalism was too individualistic, too reductionistic, and too unconcerned with history. For Machen, true Christianity was an historic community with a full and coherent theology. True Christianity, as Dr. Machen knew it in the Reformed tradition, came to doctrinal expression in a full confession of faith, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Dr. Machen believed a confession expressed the mind of the church and showed church members what the church confessed as the great and necessary teachings of the Bible. The confession should serve as an antidote to doctrinal ignorance in the church as the church diligently teaches its confession to its members. The confession should show the church what doctrines it must fight to uphold. It should strengthen the church as the bulwark of the truth.

Today, evangelical churches face doctrinal challenges every bit as serious as those of the 1920s. Some evangelicals reject the inerrancy of the Bible. Some reject the historic doctrine of God for what they call *“open theism.”* Some reject the biblical doctrine of justification that was recovered by the Reformation for some form of moralism.

Evangelical churches today, however, are far less troubled by the serious doctrinal errors that divide them than they were in the 1920s. They are less vigilant than they were then. The church generally has not learned the lesson of confessionalism. Doctrinal knowledge, biblical understanding, and disciplined Christian living seem to have declined rather than advanced since the 1920s.

Paul’s call to thoughtful vigilance is needed more today than ever. Ministers, elders, and church members today must be renewed in the truth by a full and careful knowledge of doctrine contained for us in the great confessions of the churches. Then we will know where and when to fight, as well as the truth for which we fight. As Paul wrote to Timothy: *“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers”* (1 Timothy 4:16). ~ **Dr. W. Robert Godfrey**



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What Is Truth?

What is truth? This question raised by Pilate, when Jesus Christ stood trial before him, exposed his own worldview. He lived in a world in which absolute truth did not exist. I think Pilate's voice was dismissive and filled with disdain. I imagine he sneered in mockery, angry that Christ dared to speak with truth. Though he looked straight into the face of the incarnate Truth, he could not discern it. Pilate was like so many today, a postmodernist, but one living in premodern times.

What is truth? It is defined as that which conforms with fact or reality. It is genuineness, veracity, or actuality. In a word, truth is reality. It is how things actually are. Theologically, truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God. Truth is the self-disclosure of God Himself. It is what it is because God declares it so and made it so. All truth must be defined in terms of God, whose very nature is truth.

God the Father is "*the God of truth*" (Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16, NASB and hereafter). Jesus Christ is "*full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). In fact, He is "*the truth*" (14:6). The Holy Spirit is "*the Spirit of truth*" (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Paul calls Scripture "*the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15). Jesus prayed, "*Your word is truth*" (John 17:17). Everything about God is true. God always tells it like it is.

How valuable is the truth? Its worth is more "*than gold, yes, than much fine gold*" (Psalm 19:10). John Calvin says, "*Nothing is deemed more precious by God than truth.*" No one can be saved without the truth. Nor can anyone be sanctified or strengthened without it. This being so, what are the characteristics of truth? What are its distinguishing properties?

First, truth is divine. Ultimately, all truth is God's truth. Truth is from above. It is not of this world. It is not what the crowd speculates something to be. It is not determined by opinion polls, nor is it discovered by public surveys. It is not grandfathered in by human tradition. Truth can be known only by divine revelation.

God is the one Source and sole Author of truth. Sin is whatever God says it is. Judgment is whatever God says it is. Salvation is what God says it is. Heaven and hell are what God says they are. It matters not what man says but simply what God says. One word of what God says is worth more than ten thousand libraries of what man says. "*Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar*" (Romans 3:4).

Second, truth is absolute. Without God, there cannot be any absolutes. Without absolutes, there can be no objective, universal truths. Without absolutes, truth becomes subjective, relative, and pragmatic. Without absolutes, truth gives way to mere personal or cultural preferences. But to the contrary, all truth is absolute because God is absolute truth.

This means that only what is of truth is true. Everything contrary to the truth is a lie. Truth is exclusive, not inclusive. Truth is discriminating as it excludes what is not true. Truth is incompatible with and intolerant of all error. If all truth is God's truth, then all untruths are the Devil's lies.

The issue in our day is whether there is absolute truth that is true for everyone, no matter who they are, where they live, or what they do. Many people say truth is whatever they want it to be. They claim that what you believe is "*true for you*" and what I believe is "*true for me,*" even when the two are worlds apart. Something cannot be both true and not true. In such a worldview of self-deception, truth is no longer objective.



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All truth is universally true. There is no place where truth is not true. It is comprehensive, total, complete. Francis Schaeffer maintains, “*Biblical Christianity is Truth concerning total reality.*” That is, it exists without any exceptions. Truth is absolute because it is derived from the one God. Absolute truth depends on God.

Third, truth is singular. That is to say, truth is a single entity. It does not exist in bits and pieces of unrelated ideas or disconnected data. The Bible most often uses the definite article when speaking of the truth. Truth can never be merely a truth, as if it exists in fragments from various sources. Truth is not a collection of ideologies gleaned from detached sources. It can never be found in a study of comparative religions or competing philosophies. Instead, all truth is found in the one true God.

Because truth is one body of truth, it is always internally consistent. It never contradicts itself. Truth always speaks with one voice and is always in perfect agreement with itself. It is always in harmony with everything else it says, since each aspect of truth is congruent with the sum of its parts.

Schaeffer notes, “*Christianity is not a series of truths in the plural, but rather truth spelled with a capital ‘T.’*” In other words, truth presents a singular worldview. It presents one origin for the universe, one problem of the human race, one way of salvation, one way of holiness, one standard for the family, one plan for human history, one consummation of the age. James Montgomery Boice asserts, “*Truth holds together. There is no phase of truth that is not related to every other phase of truth. All things that are true are part of the truth and stand in proper relationship to God, who is Himself the truth.*” Truth is consistent with itself.

Fourth, truth is objective. This means that truth is not subjective. It is not discovered by personal feelings nor determined by private intuitions. Instead, truth is propositional. It is conveyed in narrowly defined words that have rational definitions and is stated in precise terms that communicate real meaning. Words mean something in regard to truth. Therefore, truth is black and white. It is definite, definitive, and conclusive. Truth is not abstract, vague, or nebulous. It is accurately stated by the fixed meaning of words and can be observed, discussed, studied, analyzed, believed, proclaimed, and defended.

Because truth is objective, it is impartial, unbiased, unprejudiced, and non-partisan. It speaks to all people in all places the same. Truth never speaks out of both sides of its mouth. It never caters to the crowd. It never says one thing to one person and something else to another. Truth addresses all people alike as it finds them.

Fifth, truth is immutable. God does not change and neither does His truth, which cannot be true today but not true tomorrow. Truth is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Right is always right and wrong is forever wrong. Society may try to redefine morality. Culture may try to reclassify its mores. But Jesus identified Himself as the Truth, not the custom of the day. Truth is forever the same. The psalmist says, “*Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven*” (119:89). Isaiah 40:8 affirms, “*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of God abides forever.*” The world changes. Kingdoms rise and fall. But truth remains unchanging.

Truth is permanent, fixed, and established. It is inflexible, unvarying, constant, lasting, enduring, timeless, unchanging. Therefore, truth is always relevant. It is always current, always contemporary, always relevant. Truth addresses the issues of the day with penetrating insight. It is never outdated, never obsolete, never expired. Truth never tires, never wanes, never ceases to be true.



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Sixth, truth is authoritative. Truth does not stammer or stutter. It speaks with the supreme authority of God Himself. It always makes demands upon us and never offers mere suggestions. It never presents just one more option to consider. It is never intended to be simply interesting. It never speaks to tickle our curiosity. Instead, truth speaks with the voice of sovereignty. Truth roars with the sound of many waters, drowning out every other voice. Truth is commanding, arresting, and directional. It has the authority to order us. Truth must, therefore, be heard. It demands our undivided attention. We cannot pretend that truth has not spoken. We cannot act as if it will go away. We cannot live in denial of truth. It lays hold of us by the lapels and draws us close. It summons us and mandates our complete compliance. Truth is binding upon our lives. Truth demands our response.

Likewise, truth possesses supernatural power. Jesus said, “*You will know the truth and the truth will make you free*” (John 8:32). When received by faith, the truth delivers our souls from the tyranny of sin. Jesus prayed, “*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth*” (17:17). The truth cleanses and purifies. It penetrates into the deepest level of the human heart, cuts to the bone, and works from the inside out (Hebrews 4:12). It has life-changing power. It converts, sanctifies, and strengthens. It conforms, transforms, and reforms. Truth renews our minds, revives our hearts, and redirects our steps.

Truth has the final word in all matters, telling us how to worship and how to walk. It tells us how to follow Christ. It is the final arbitrator on any subject. It is the final judge of every life. All people are measured by the truth. Every life is weighed in the balances by the truth. Every destiny is marked by the truth. And so the truth will have the final say in every life. ~ *Dr. Steven J. Lawson*

An Urgent Threat to Churches and Parents

Right now, even as you read this column, religious liberty is threatened in the heartland of America. For the last 45 years, Faith Church in Lafayette and West Lafayette, Indiana, has offered a ministry of Biblical counseling. The church has made a costly and sacrificial commitment to ministering to people based on the Word of God. But, as **WORLD’s** Steve West reports, “*that outreach is now threatened by a city council proposal that would penalize anyone who talks with minors to help them overcome unwanted same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria.*”

The proposed ordinance is presented as a ban on “*conversion therapy,*” but the church categorically rejects that method as unbiblical. In reality, these so-called bans are being used as muzzles to silence evangelical churches and ministries that have never had anything to do with conversion therapy. The aim is to coerce churches into forfeiting any counsel that would imply or teach that there is anything sinful about LGBTQ behaviors, impulses, feelings, and identities. In this case, the proposal before the West Lafayette City Council would, if enacted into law, threaten the ability of churches to preach the Bible and would even threaten the right of Christian parents to counsel their own children.

This is Indiana, for crying out loud. We have seen similar legislation adopted in Canada and now considered in the United Kingdom. Across America, similar initiatives have been undertaken at both the state and local levels. But this is in the heartland of America, where many Christians believe themselves to be safe and their churches to be free.



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Pastor Steve Viars of Faith Church put the matter this way: “*Imagine a scenario where an area teenager voluntarily visits a self-identified faith-based counselor, but because the counselor used the Bible as their source of truth, the local police department imposed a fine of \$1,000 per day.*” That scenario is precisely what this proposed ordinance would produce. Pastor Viars continued, “*Sound like a poorly written plotline from a dystopian flick? Actually, that could be our new reality, courtesy of the West Lafayette City Council and their proposed Ordinance 31-21.*”

A look at the text of the proposed ordinance reveals that the pastor is speaking the truth. He is not exaggerating. Note that this ordinance is not addressed simply to licensed professional counselors. Instead, it is addressed to anyone who counsels, and counseling is defined as “*techniques used to help individuals learn how to solve problems and make decisions related to personal growth, vocational, family, and other interpersonal concerns.*” That would include the very conversations that are the life and work of the local church, and the daily life of parents.

The proposed ordinance represents a direct attack upon the right of churches in West Lafayette to preach the gospel and conduct a gospel ministry based upon Biblical authority. It directly assaults the rights of Christian parents. It threatens to criminalize any effort to instruct, persuade, and encourage young people to honor Christ and obey Holy Scripture—at least when it comes to their struggles with sexuality.

The threat to American churches and Christian parents is clear. This is nothing less than an attempt to coerce our churches into total capitulation to the moral revolutionaries and the LGBTQ movement. It is bracing enough to realize that the U.S. House of Representatives has already passed the so-called “*Equality Act*” that would subvert religious liberty and push the demands of the LGBTQ community to the forefront. In this case, we are looking at an attempt to silence Christian witness in a city in Indiana.

Councilwoman Shannon Kang, as reported by WFYI, a public radio station in Indianapolis, stated that “*as a queer person herself,*” she wanted the council to approve the ordinance. She added, “*Ordinances and resolutions like this are intended to change the culture.*”

You bet they are. This proposed ordinance attempts to change the culture by silencing the church and its ministries, by intimidating Christian parents, and by sending the public a signal that holding to the Biblical convictions of historic Christianity is not only “*on the wrong side of history,*” but also on the wrong side of the law.

Sensing opposition to the ordinance, the city council has twice postponed public consideration of the measure. But proponents are determined, and they are confident that momentum is on their side. Some advocates of the ordinance claim that their intention is not to silence the church but to ban certain therapeutic techniques. If that were true, they would have written the ordinance differently. As it stands, it is a direct threat to the integrity and liberty of Christian ministry.

The real issue here is not opposition to a specific and discredited form of therapy, which is incompatible with Biblical counseling in the first place. The real issue is the determination of the moral revolutionaries—in their own words—to change the culture.

If they can get away with this in West Lafayette, Indiana, they can get away with it anywhere. ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**



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If you have a April 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 April 2022

Birthdays

Nehemiah W. (1)
Amber H. (4)
Carol L. (7)

David A. (8)
Raena Grace P. (20)
Jeremy W. (26)

Anniversaries

Walt and Carol L. (15)
Jack and Rita B. (16)

The Sovereignty of God

In most discussions about predestination, there is great concern about protecting the dignity and freedom of man. But we must also observe the crucial importance of the sovereignty of God. Though God is not a creature, he is personal, with supreme dignity and supreme freedom. We are aware of the ticklish problems surrounding the relationship between God's sovereignty and human freedom. We must also be aware of the close relationship between God's sovereignty and God's freedom. The freedom of a sovereign is always greater than the freedom of his subjects.

When we speak of divine sovereignty we are speaking about God's authority and about God's power. As sovereign, God is the supreme authority of heaven and earth. All other authority is lesser authority. Any other authority that exists in the universe is derived from and dependent upon God's authority. All other forms of authority exist either by God's command or by God's permission. The word *authority* contains within itself the word *author*. God is the author of all things over which he has authority. He created the universe. He owns the universe. His ownership gives Him certain rights. He may do with His universe what is pleasing to His Holy will. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. - Chosen by God*



West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership

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Please submit information to the editor by the second Sunday of each month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or it's leadership.