



*Volume 9 Issue 10*

# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



*October 2022*

*Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

## *The Goal of Christian Living*

I once read the following definition of a fanatic: “A fanatic is a person who, having lost sight of his goal, redoubles his effort to get there.” The fanatic runs around frantically getting nowhere. He is a basketball player without a basket, a tennis player without a net, a golfer without a green.

For a Christian to make progress in sanctification, in learning to please God, he must have a clear idea of what his goal is. Though the Bible makes that goal clear, it is one that is easily forgotten.

What is the goal? Jesus stated it this way: “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33).

Let us examine the elements of this charge. **First**, Jesus said that we must *seek*. To seek something requires effort. It involves a diligent search. It is like the woman who lost a coin and swept every nook and cranny of the house to find it. Seeking is not accomplished by taking a nap. It involves work. Persistent work. We do not sit back and wait for God to drop it in our laps.

We all know the story of the Greek mathematician Archimedes who discovered his famous principle of specific gravity while taking a bath. He shouted, “*Eureka, I have found it.*” We also know the legend of Isaac Newton’s discovering the law of gravity while sitting under an apple tree when an apple fell on his head. These flashes of insight that befell Archimedes and Newton were merely the culmination of years of diligent quest. Their achievements were not a matter of luck. It is said that Thomas Edison experimented with over a thousand different substances before he finally discovered one that would act as a suitable filament for the electric light. Not much luck, but much work. So is it with us in our learning to please God.

We are to seek the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness. We notice that Jesus says that we are to seek these things *first*. The New Testament word that is used here for *first* is the Greek word *protos*, which does not mean simply first in a series of many things. Rather the word carries the force of *priority*. A more accurate translation of the concept would be, “*Seek ye first, above all else, the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*”

Seek the kingdom. Seek righteousness. These are the priorities of the Christian life.

### **Seeking the Kingdom of God**

What does it mean to seek the kingdom of God? There is much confusion about spiritual seeking in the Christian world. We frequently hear this comment out of the mouths of Christians: “My friend is not a Christian, but he’s seeking.”



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What is the non-Christian seeking? One thing we know he is not seeking. He is not seeking God. Paul declares, *“There is none who seeks after God”* (Romans 3:11). The unbeliever never, never, never seeks God. The unbeliever is a fugitive from God. The natural pattern for man is to run from Him, to hide from Him. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He is the Seeker; we are the ones who are running. In man’s sinful state he may look for answers to life’s puzzles, but he does not seek God

Why then does it so often seem to us that unbelievers are seeking God? We observe them. They are seeking happiness, peace of mind, relief from guilt, a meaningful life, and a host of other things that we know only God can give them. But they are not seeking God. They are seeking the *benefits* of God. Natural man’s sin is precisely this: He wants the benefits of God without God Himself.

I belabor this point for this reason: Seeking after God is a Christian enterprise. The seeking of God *begins* at conversion. Though we may proclaim to the world that we “found it,” the finding of God is, ironically, the beginning of seeking after God. To seek God is a lifelong pursuit. The seeking after God is what Jonathan Edwards called *“the main business of the Christian life.”*

To seek God’s kingdom is to fulfill the last command of Jesus as well as the crucial petition of the Lord’s Prayer: *“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

The last question His disciples asked Jesus was, *“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6). Just moments before Jesus departed this planet in His glorious Ascension His students pressed Him with one last question. The question was about the kingdom. Jesus answered the question first with a mild rebuke and then with a command: *“You shall be witnesses to Me”* (Acts 1:8).

We are called to seek the kingdom by bearing witness to the kingdom. We are to seek to show the world what the kingdom of God looks like. For the kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven means that loyal children of the King do the King’s will here and now. We bear witnesses to God’s kingdom by serving God’s King. This is the will of God. This is what pleases Him. There is a reason why Jesus links the coming of the kingdom with the doing of the will of God. *“Your kingdom come. Your will be done”* belong together. They are two sides of the same coin. The kingdom comes on earth where God’s will is done on earth.

The conclusion we reach is this: The great overarching goal of the Christian life is *obedience to the King*. And he is pleased when we obey.

### **Seeking Righteousness**

The quest for the kingdom is linked with the quest for the righteousness of God. It is the kind of righteousness displayed by Jesus Himself. Jesus’ life was a blaze of righteousness. He was the Lamb without blemish, the Son of whom the Father was well pleased. The Scriptures say of Him that zeal for his Father’s house consumed Him (John 2:17). His meat and His drink was to do the will of His Father (John 4:34). Jesus was not only Incarnate God but was also the supreme man of righteousness. We cannot possibly imitate His deity, but we are to imitate His single-minded devotion to obedience, His commitment to pleasing God.



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When I first became a Christian I was introduced to the priorities of the Christian community. I learned quickly that it was expected of me that I have a daily devotion time, a time reserved for Bible reading and prayer. I was expected to go to church. I was expected to have a kind of piety that was evident by not cursing, not drinking, not smoking, and the like. I had no idea that biblical righteousness went far beyond these things. However, like most new Christians, I learned to emphasize such things. My personal letters took on a new pattern of language. They began to sound like pages from New Testament epistles. I soon learned to use Christian jargon in my everyday speech. I didn't "tell" anybody anything, I "shared" it with them. Every good fortune was a "blessing," and I found I could hardly speak without sprinkling my sentences with spiritual platitudes.

Soon, however, I found that there was more to the Christian life than daily devotions and sanctified words. I realized that God wanted more. He wanted me to grow in my faith and obedience, to go beyond milk to the meat. I also discovered that Christian jargon was an almost meaningless form of communication, both to non-Christians and Christians alike. I found myself more interested in echoing a subculture's lingo than in finding true godliness.

My error was this: I was confusing spirituality with righteousness. I also discovered that I was not alone in this. I was caught up with a crowd who confused the means with the end. Spirituality can be a cheap substitute for righteousness.

Over the years I've had many young Christians ask me how to be more spiritual or more pious. Rare has been the earnest student who said, "Teach me how to be righteous." Why, I wondered, does anybody want to be spiritual? What is the purpose of spirituality? What use is there in piety?

Spirituality and piety are not ends in themselves. In fact they are worthless *unless* they are means to a higher goal. The goal must go beyond spirituality to righteousness.

Spiritual disciplines are vitally necessary to achieve righteousness. Bible study, prayer, church attendance, evangelism, are necessary for Christian growth, but they cannot be the final goal. I cannot achieve righteousness without spirituality. But it is possible to be "spiritual," at least on the surface, without attaining righteousness.

Jesus was a man of prayer. His prayer life was intense and powerful. He was a man of vast knowledge of the Scriptures. He obviously mastered the Word of God. He was spiritual. But His spirituality ultimately showed itself by authentic righteousness. So His spirituality was not merely a surface thing. His inner life displayed itself in outward obedience, obedience even unto death.

What is righteousness? The simplest answer to that question is this: *Righteousness is doing what is right in the sight of God.* This is a simple definition that is far more complex under the surface. To be righteous is to do everything that God calls us to do. The demands of true righteousness are so great and so many that none of us ever in this world achieves it perfectly. It involves following the whole counsel of God.



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There are times when Scripture provides a simple summary of true righteousness. There are occasions when God reduces the vast sum of commandments to a few that capture the essence of true righteousness. Let us examine a few of those summaries.

### **Micah's Summary**

In the book of the prophet Micah we read this summary statement on holy living:

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8, NAS*

Justice, kindness (or loyal love), and humility. This triad is not easy to achieve. God wants me to care about the weighty matters of justice and mercy. He enjoys the companionship of humble saints. He promises to add grace to the humble and to resist the proud.

Charles Colson had recently been released from prison after spending time incarcerated for his part in the Ellsberg paper incident. Though not part of the Watergate scandal, Colson was linked to the episode that brought about the downfall of Richard Nixon. Colson was speaking on a university campus and was being heckled unmercifully by some anti-Nixon students. One of the students interrupted Colson's speech by shouting, "Hey, Colson, why did you stick by Nixon?"

Colson stopped his speech and looked at the heckler. He replied, "Because he was my friend."

With that answer the audience erupted in spontaneous applause. Though the audience despised the Watergate scandal and all that it involved, they appreciated a kind of loyalty that would allow a man to go to jail for the sake of friendship.

When Micah speaks of "kindness" he uses the Hebrew word for "loyal love." It is the kind of love God has for His children. It is a steadfast love, a love that endures. It is the kind of love that lasts. Though God hardly approves of everything His children do, He stands by them. That's a priority of Christian love.

My children do not have to earn my love. They can disappoint me, frustrate me, and even anger me, but their failures do not disqualify them from my love. The Prodigal Son's father never stopped loving him. I cannot always give my permission but I must always give my love. To endure in love is to imitate how God loves us even when we fail.

Loyalty. Kindness. These qualities are what makes it possible for Christians to keep moving in spite of our sin. To be a loyal friend requires more than blind acceptance. It requires patience, long-suffering, gentleness, the kind of fruit that flows from the Holy Spirit. It is because Christ is loyal to us that we are motivated to show that same kind of loyalty to others.



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### **Jesus' Summary**

Jesus summarized the Christian life in the simplest summation of all: *“Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise”* (Luke 6:31). This we call the Golden Rule—the law of gold, a gold more precious than diamonds and rubies. Any child can recite the Golden Rule, but to make it an active part of daily living is no mean feat.

I hate petty criticism. I do not enjoy the company of nitpickers. Judgmental people are difficult for me to enjoy. I cannot control how such people relate to me, but I can learn from them. From everyone who hurts me I can learn what kinds of things are hurtful. Chances are that what hurts me is the same kind of behavior that hurts other people. Therefore, I can learn what not to do to others.

Our response to petty criticism is often to retaliate in kind, instead of in kindness. This is where the Golden Rule touches life. Here is where Jesus spoke of not returning evil for evil. Doing to others what we want others to do to us is simply a matter of kindness. It involves being thoughtful and considerate. But it is more than mere politeness. It is doing what is right. It is doing what pleases God.

Righteousness means right living. It means treating people right. It means living with personal integrity. A righteous person is one whom we can trust. His integrity is consistent. It is not for sale. A righteous person is moral without being moralistic. He is pious without being pietistic. He has a sense of concern for other people's feelings. He wants to treat people right because he has the overarching desire to please a loving God.

### **James' Summary**

The author of the Letter of James was probably the blood brother of Jesus. He was called “James the Just” or “James the Righteous” in the early church. His summary of true righteousness may be shocking to some Christians:

*This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. James 1:27, NASB*

True religion means visiting orphans and widows. Why does James say this? He understood that true righteousness is *people-oriented*. Our prayers are worthless if they do not result in the care of people. In the ancient world the orphan and the widow were almost helpless in society. They had financial stress, legal impotency, and, above all, the emotional stress of the pain of loneliness.

We now have government programs to aid orphans and widows financially. They have some legal rights. But the estate of widowhood or orphanhood is still not pleasant. They—and all other people who are lonely and helpless—still need the outreach of love. Societal institutions may change, but the requirement to show compassion to those in need stays the same. Piety without compassion is a lie. It turns the Golden Rule into rust.



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We please the loving God when we obey the Golden Rule. We please Him when we pursue justice and mercy and when we practice loyal love. We please Him when we treat others as we wish to be treated. We please Him when we reach out to the forgotten and the downtrodden.

These, rules of Scripture for righteous living, weigh far more than concerns about a “spiritual” life that precludes drinking, smoking, and cursing.

Righteousness has rules, but it is more than rules. If we care for rules without caring for people, we have missed the goal of righteousness. The scriptural rules come from God precisely because He cares about people.

We need rules to be righteous, but they must be the right rules. They must be God’s rules. We may accept no substitutes. In God’s Word we find adequate rules for pleasing God with a righteous life. And if we abide by those rules, we are not goal-less fanatics, but true children of the King. ~ *Pleasing God - Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*

## *Modernity to Postmodernity: From Bad to Worse*

We rejoice when evil dictators are brought to justice. But all too often it creates a void waiting to be filled by an even worse ruler.

The same can be said for worldviews as well. The fall of one dominant secular philosophy invariably paves the way for an even more ungodly belief system to follow. The demise of modernism as a worldview is certainly a clear illustration of this.

### **Modernism**

Modernity, in simple terms, was characterized by the belief that truth exists and that the scientific method is the only reliable way to determine that truth. In the so-called modern era, most academic disciplines (philosophy, science, literature, and education) were driven primarily by rationalistic presuppositions. In other words, modern thought treated human reason as the final arbiter of what is true. The modern mind discounted the idea of the supernatural and looked for scientific and rationalistic explanations for everything. But modern thinkers retained their belief that knowledge of the truth is possible. They were still seeking universal and absolute truths that applied to everyone. Scientific methodologies became the chief means by which modern people sought to gain that knowledge.

Those presuppositions gave birth to Darwinism, which in turn spawned a string of humanistic ideas and worldviews. Most prominent among them were several atheistic, rationalistic, utopian philosophies—including Marxism, fascism, socialism, communism, and theological liberalism.

Modernism’s devastating repercussions were soon felt worldwide. Various struggles between those ideologies (and others like them) dominated the twentieth century. All failed. After two world wars, nonstop social revolutions, civil unrest, and a long ideological cold war, modernity was declared dead by most in the academic world.



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## *Modernity to Postmodernity: From Bad to Worse*

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The symbolic death of the modern era was marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall, one of the more apt and imposing monuments to modern ideology. Because the wall was a concrete expression of modernity's misguided utopian worldview, its sudden demolition was also a perfect symbol for the collapse of modernity.

Most, if not all, of the major dogmas and worldviews from the modern era are now deemed completely outmoded and hopelessly discredited in virtually every corner of the intellectual and academic world. Even modernist religion's fascination with higher criticism has given way to abstract spirituality.

The overconfident rationalism and human conceit that characterized the modern era has finally—and fittingly—had most of the wind taken out of its sails.

### **Postmodernism**

Accordingly, the new ways of thinking have been collectively nicknamed postmodern.

If you have been paying attention to the world around us, you have probably heard that expression a lot recently. The term postmodernism has been used increasingly since the 1980s to describe several popular trends in architecture, art, literature, history, culture, and religion. It is not an easy term to explain because it describes a way of thinking that defies (and even rejects) any clear definition.

Postmodernism in general is marked by a tendency to dismiss the possibility of any sure and settled knowledge of the truth. Postmodernism suggests that if objective truth exists, it cannot be known objectively or with any degree of certainty. That is because (according to postmodernists) the subjectivity of the human mind makes knowledge of objective truth impossible. So it is useless to think of truth in objective terms. Objectivity is an illusion. Nothing is certain, and the thoughtful person will never speak with too much conviction about anything. Strong convictions about any point of truth are judged supremely arrogant and hopelessly naive. Everyone is entitled to his own truth.

Postmodernism therefore has no positive agenda to assert anything as true or good. Perhaps you have noticed that only the most heinous crimes are still seen as evil. (Actually, there are many today who are prepared to dispute whether anything is "evil," so such language is fast disappearing from public discourse.) That is because the notion of evil itself does not fit in the postmodern scheme of things. If we can't really know anything for certain, how can we judge anything evil?

Therefore postmodernism's one goal and singular activity is the systematic deconstruction of every other truth claim. The chief tools being employed to accomplish this are relativism, subjectivism, the denial of every dogma, the dissection and annihilation of every clear definition, the relentless questioning of every axiom, the undue exaltation of mystery and paradox, the deliberate exaggeration of every ambiguity, and above all the cultivation of uncertainty about everything.



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## *Modernity to Postmodernity: From Bad to Worse*

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If you were to challenge me to boil down postmodern thought into its pure essence and identify the gist of it in one single, simple, central characteristic, I would say it is the rejection of every expression of certainty. In the postmodern perspective, certainty is regarded as inherently arrogant, elitist, intolerant, oppressive—and therefore always wrong.

The demise of modernity and the resulting blow to rationalistic human arrogance is certainly something to celebrate. From a spiritual perspective, however, the rise of postmodernism has been anything but a positive replacement.

Postmodernism has resulted in a widespread rejection of truth and the enshrinement of skepticism. Postmodernists despise truth claims. They also spurn every attempt to construct a coherent worldview, labeling all comprehensive ideologies and belief systems “metanarratives,” or grand stories. Such “stories,” they say, can’t possibly do justice to everyone’s individual perspective, and therefore they are always inadequate.

Postmodernism’s preference for subjectivity over objectivity makes it inherently relativistic. Naturally, the postmodernist recoils from absolutes and does not want to concede any truths that might seem axiomatic or self-evident. Instead, truth, if acknowledged at all, becomes something infinitely pliable and ultimately unknowable in any objective sense.

Postmodernism therefore signals a major triumph for relativism—the view that truth is not fixed and objective, but something individually determined by each person’s unique, subjective perception. All this is ultimately a vain attempt to try to eliminate morality and guilt from human life. Eliminating rational thought is key to those objectives. ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*

## *The Reality of Living Before God*

I have a good friend who thinks I am too old-fashioned. Through all the years we’ve known each other, he has never ceased to remind me of his observation. And while I certainly try to maintain an age-appropriate outlook on life, I must admit that my old-fashioned tendencies too often get the best of me. Although it does not seem old-fashioned to me in the least, when asking for a woman’s hand in marriage, I still think it is appropriate for a man first to speak with the father of the woman he hopes to marry prior to speaking with the woman.

I recall the occasion on which I spoke with my father-in-law about having his daughter’s hand in marriage. Although the conversation was somewhat awkward for both of us—I never having had such a conversation before, and he having the first conversation regarding his oldest of five daughters—we said all that we knew to say to one another. I told him I would do everything it takes to support and love his daughter, no matter how much I had to work. He asked many questions, and I apparently responded with all the right answers. Then, at the end of our conversation he looked deep into my eyes and asked the simple question: “Do you love her?” To which I responded, “Yes.”





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## *The Reality of Living Before God* *Continued from Page 8*

Though his question was straight forward and to the point, as he looked at me intensely he was certainly trying to communicate something far beyond the scope of his simple question. In essence, he was communicating the weight of the agreement we had just reached regarding his daughter's hand in marriage.

As I reflect on that conversation and the wonderful relationship I have had with my father and mother-in-law ever since, I am reminded of the covenant that exists not only between myself and them but the covenant that exists between myself and the Lord. It was as if my father-in-law had said to me, "Young man, you better keep your word, or else you're going to have to deal with me. Although I am not able to be with you everywhere you go, the Lord will keep His eye on you to make sure you love and care for my daughter as you said you would."

Although the conversation that took place between Laban and Jacob, recorded in Genesis 31, was different than the conversation I had with my father-in-law, there is one thing the two conversations have in common. They both recognized the reality of the Lord's sovereign direction and accountability in the covenant of marriage.

In the covenant Jacob made with his father-in-law, Laban, Jacob took a stone and established it as a pillar, marking the place where the covenant was made between them. Laban recognized the importance of the stone, saying, it is "a witness between you and me today" (Genesis 31:48). Laban then proclaimed to Jacob these words: "The Lord watch between you and me, when we are out of one another's sight. If you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me" (Genesis 31:49-50). Laban's statement is fascinating. It reveals not only his right, albeit "old-fashioned," understanding of marriage but his right understanding of the character of God. Laban's theology was accurate insofar as he understood that God was omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipresent (everywhere present). He also understood that God does not take covenants lightly—especially the covenant of marriage, which so many couples in our day and age treat like a contract that can be torn up at any given time.

Laban held Jacob to his word by holding him accountable to God. Laban made it absolutely clear that God would be the supreme agent in holding Jacob to his word. In his commentary on Genesis 31, John Calvin comments, "Laban commits to the judgment of God, for vengeance, whatever offense either of them should be guilty of against the other in his absence; as if he would say, 'Though the knowledge of the injury should not reach me, because I shall be far distant, yet the Lord, who is everywhere present, will behold it.' Which sentiment he more clearly expresses afterwards, when he says, 'No one is with us; God will be witness between me and thee.' By which words he means, that God will be a severe avenger of every wickedness, though there should be no judge upon earth to decide the cause."

Calvin's explanation is right to the point as he retells the conversation between Jacob and Laban in his own words, saying, "I shall be far distant, yet the Lord, who is everywhere present, will behold it." Even though Laban would not be with Jacob everywhere he went, Laban knew that the Lord is omnipresent and therefore the ultimate one to whom Jacob would be accountable.



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## *The Reality of Living Before God* *Continued from Page 9*

Inasmuch as we understand doctrinal truths about God, we understand the practical realities of living before an omnipresent and omniscient God. For whether or not we fully understand how God is omnipresent and omniscient, we are faced with the reality of His presence and knowledge wherever we go. We cannot escape His presence, nor can we fool Him with our lies. Therefore, the Lord holds us to the covenants we have made. He holds us accountable as He holds us to our word, and not only does He hold us to our word but He holds Himself to His own word. He is always faithful to us, loving and cherishing us even in our sickness and health, as long as we shall live and through eternity. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons - Senior pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., chief publishing officer for Ligonier Ministries, editor of Tabletalk magazine, and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow.**

### *The Law of Love*

When you read the Bible and it describes Christianity, and then you look at yourself, do you ever wonder whether you're a Christian at all? I know I do.

Neither our assurance as believers nor God's love for us hinges on our ability to live out certain Christian principles; rather, both depend on what Christ has achieved for us on the cross. Even so, the Bible teaches us to look for evidences of our salvation in the present. If we truly are the Father's children, we are bound to display a love for others that resembles Jesus' love for us.

Jesus calls for us to love people in a way that is not related to their attractiveness, merit, or lovability. We know that this is exactly how God loves us—His love is not based on us cleaning up our act, deserving His attention, or demonstrating that we're predisposed towards or useful to Him. None of these things contribute to God's love for us. No—"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, emphasis added).

The greatest measure of our faith, then, is love—love that reflects the love that we have received in such abundance. We engage in agape love—unconditional, sacrificial love—because it is an expression of the character of God and all He's done for us. We don't exercise this kind of love for our enemies because we are blind to who they really are but because we have gazed at God's love for us. Jesus says that when we see others as they are—in all of their ugliness and spitefulness, all of their cursing, all of their hatred, and all of their unwillingness to pay us what they owe us—we are to be realistic about all of it, and then love them. Seeing all of that enmity, says Jesus, I want you to love your enemies.

By nature, we are incapable of displaying such love. But consider the kind of difference we would make to our culture if we were prepared to live out, in both everyday and extraordinary ways, a Christlike love which seeks to do what's best for those who have acted in enmity towards us. That would be revolutionary—without any question at all. ~ **Dr. Alistair Begg - He holds an Honorary Doctorate Degree from Cedarville University located in Cedarville, Ohio**



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*Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

If you have an October birthday or anniversary that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please e-mail Walt at [gwlcf10415@gmail.com](mailto:gwlcf10415@gmail.com).

## *Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner October 2022*

### *Birthdays*

*Charlene S. (3)  
Hazel Kay T. (10)*

### *Anniversaries*

*Andy and Emily L. (10)*

David Wells has crafted a notable working definition of Christian theology:

Theology is the sustained effort to know the character, will, and acts of the triune God as he has disclosed and interpreted these for his people in Scripture ... in order that we might know him, learn to think our thoughts after him, live our lives in his world on his terms, and by thought and action project his truth into our own time and culture.



*West Suffolk Baptist Church  
Leadership*

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.

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