



*Volume 9 Issue 12*

# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



*December 2022*

*Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

## *Give Me Scotland, or I Die*

Perhaps more than anything else, John Knox is known for his prayer “*Give me Scotland, or I die.*” Knox’s prayer was not an arrogant demand, but the passionate plea of a man willing to die for the sake of the pure preaching of the gospel and the salvation of his countrymen. Knox’s greatness lay in his humble dependence on our sovereign God to save His people, revive a nation, and reform His church. As is evident from his preaching and prayer, Knox believed neither in the power of his preaching nor in the power of his prayer, but in the power of the gospel and the power of God, who sovereignly ordains preaching and prayer as secondary means in the salvation of His people.

Although Knox had been imprisoned and enslaved, and though he was often infirm and under threat of persecution, he consistently lived out his theology, believing that “*one man with God is always in the majority.*” As such, the prayers of one man heard at the throne of God were a threat to the throne of Scotland. During the time of the sixteenth-century Scottish Reformation, Knox’s ministry of preaching and prayer were so well known that the Roman Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, is reputed to have said, “*I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe.*”

Above all, Knox was a committed pastor and churchman whose ministry served as a compass to numerous pastors throughout Scotland. Knox’s unwavering commitment to the pure preaching of the gospel was a bright and shining light amid the darkness in a nation steeped in doctrinal and ecclesiastical compromise. He reinvigorated God’s shepherds throughout the nation; this, in turn, reformed the church and, thus, in God’s providence, revived the country. Most notably, what inspired the pastors perhaps more than any other characteristic in Knox was that he did not fear men, because he feared God—he was a man willing to offend men, because he was unwilling to offend God.

John Knox preached and prayed to the end that God would rescue Scotland precisely because he was clinging to Jesus’ promise and prayer to save His people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. It should be no surprise to us then that when Knox was near death, he asked his wife to read to him the High Priestly Prayer in John 17 that our Lord Jesus prayed the night before He went to the cross. Knox called this passage “*my first anchor.*” For indeed, Christ is the captain of our souls and Christ’s prayer is the anchor and only hope of the nations. Therefore, in light of so great an example of God’s power working through one man, let each one of us pray with the same passion for our nation—and all nations—as Knox prayed for Scotland. ~ ***Dr. Burk Parsons***

## *The 3 Tenses of the Gospel*

We never get past the gospel. What saved us in the past, when we were still in our sins—fallen sons of Adam by nature—was the grace of God in the gospel. Nowhere is that put more succinctly than in Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).



# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



## *The 3 Tenses of the Gospel* *Continued from Page 1*

But the New Testament can also speak about our salvation in the present tense—we are “*being saved*” (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15)—as well as in the future tense—we “*shall . . . be saved*” (Romans 5:9).

There is only one salvation and one way of salvation. What occurred in our past, works itself out in the present, and comes to consummation in the future is all of a piece. Justification now leads to glorification then (Romans 8:29–30).

True, some talk unadvisedly about being “*saved again*,” as though salvation could be lost one day and regained the next. In truth, some who speak this way were never saved in the first place. They had made a decision, but it was just that—a human decision and not a sovereign, life-renewing work of the Holy Spirit “*from above*” (cf. John 3:3, 5). Others who speak this way may have been converted but never acquired the fullness of assurance that should accompany it; when they did, it felt like a new birth all over again.

Why, then, does the New Testament speak of salvation in three tenses? The answer lies in considering what happens in salvation. Initially, at the point of regeneration, our sins are forgiven—entirely and completely. We have been delivered from sin’s penalty. Through faith, we are reckoned to be righteous—as righteous as Christ is. Then, there is sanctification—a process whereby we are being delivered from sin’s power. Ultimately, in heaven, we will be delivered from sin’s presence. John Stott has argued that when Paul reasoned with Governor Felix about “*righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment*” (Acts 24:25), he was pointing out the three tenses of salvation.

At every stage—justification, sanctification, glorification—we come with empty hands, seeking mercy from our heavenly Father. Even at the point of our obedience as Christians—we are to “*work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2:12)—we do so only because God works “*in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). And when we enter the pearly gates of heaven, wisdom will dictate that we show our empty hands and say with Edward Mote: “*On Christ the solid Rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.*”

The moment we drift away from the gospel, we perish. But if we remain on the narrow gospel way, it brings us all the way home. ~ **Dr. Derek Thomas**

## *5 Things You Should Know about Justification*

God’s Word clearly teaches the precious doctrine of justification by faith alone. All who believe “*are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith*” (Romans 3:24–25). While this doctrine is of tremendous theological importance and can be a subject of deep scholarly study, here are five truths all God’s people should know about the doctrine of justification.

### **1. Justification is a wonderful comfort**

**First**, we should know the wonderful comfort of this doctrine. Justification reminds us that Jesus Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation.



# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



## *5 Things You Should Know about Justification*

*Continued from Page 2*

He paid the penalty that our sins deserved by His sacrificial death on the cross. His death satisfied God's justice and turned away His wrath from us. Jesus also lived a perfect life by His righteous obedience to God's law. Both Christ's satisfaction and His perfect righteousness are imputed to us by grace through faith. Therefore, all believers should take comfort in knowing that the Father looks upon us in Christ as if we had been as sinless and as perfect as Jesus is.

### **2. Justification brings supreme blessing**

**Second**, we should know the supreme blessing God bestows upon us in justification. By grace through faith, we are righteous before God and heirs to eternal life. The blessing of eternal life has been conveyed upon us now, just as Jesus promised: *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life"* (John 3:36). Eternal life is a particular kind or quality of life. Eternal life means the perfect blessedness of hearts that rightly love God, minds that truly know Him, and wills that completely follow Him. Already the beginning of this new and eternal life dwells in us. We are heirs who have spiritually received eternal life as our inheritance now. And one day soon, when Jesus returns in glory, we will experience eternal life fully, body and soul. Jesus bestows upon us the eternal life of perfect and indestructible fellowship with God. We should celebrate the supreme blessing of eternal life enjoyed by those who are justified by faith.

### **3. Justification means present peace with God**

When we keep these blessings in mind, they lead us to a **third** truth regarding justification: the present peace we have with God. In Christ, all of our obligations to God have been met. Nothing stands unaccounted for between us and God. But the reality of this peace can be very hard for a sinner to accept. Casper Olevianus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, wrote *"there is nothing more difficult than to believe the forgiveness of sins."* But if we do not believe we are truly forgiven, we will not believe that we have peace with God. Dr. R.C. Sproul put it well: *"It is often a difficult thing to accept the grace of God. Our human arrogance makes us want to atone for our own sins or make it up to God with works of super-righteousness. But the fact of the matter is that we can't make it up to God. We are debtors who cannot pay. That's what justification by faith is all about."* We cannot find peace with God through our own sacrifices or our own obedience. And we don't need to try. Christ has made peace through His sacrifice and His obedience. Faith calls us to look away from ourselves and to trust in Christ's work alone. Everything that was between us and God—our sin, guilt, and condemnation—has been cleared away by the saving work of Jesus Christ. By faith in Christ, we have peace with God now (Romans 5:1).

### **4. Justification provides future hope**

Our present peace with God leads us to a **fourth** truth: we have future hope. We have peace with God now and forever on account of Christ's work. Christians do not need to live in any fear of the future, not even when we think about standing before God's final judgment. Justification is God's once for all declaration that we are righteous in His sight. This decree of God will never be revoked or annulled. Even the final judgment will simply confirm and prove the truth of Christ's promise: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life"* (John 5:24). Justification also gives us hope for the future, particularly when it comes to standing before the judgment seat of God.



# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



## *5 Things You Should Know about Justification*

*Continued from Page 3*

### **5. Justification gives eternal glory to God**

**Finally**, everything we have considered thus far leads us to the last and best thing we should know about the doctrine of justification. It gives eternal glory to God alone. The glory is all God's because He does everything from everlasting to everlasting for our salvation. The Father set His everlasting love on His people from all eternity. Out of this eternal love, He sent His Son into the world to save His people from their sins. Jesus Christ willingly came into this world and accomplished our salvation by His life, death, and resurrection. Both the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit who creates faith in us through His Word. Our faith is His gracious gift, by which we are justified. The Holy Spirit dwells in us forever, uniting us to Jesus and making us partakers of all Christ's benefits. The doctrine of justification helps us glorify the triune God who Himself does all that is necessary to make us righteous before Him. May our reflection on the precious doctrine of justification always help us to praise and glorify God our Savior. ~ *Reverend William C. Godfrey - Pastor of Christ United Reformed Church in Santee, California*

## *Modern Cultic Tendencies*

Since the nineteenth century, the U.S. has proven to have a cultural soil that is particularly well-suited to the growth and spread of diverse cultic movements. The nineteenth century alone witnessed the rise of numerous small cults as well as several significant ones, including the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons. A number of factors help us to understand why this happened when it did. But what of our own era? Is there anything in our contemporary way of thinking, or way of living, that is similarly conducive to the proliferation of cults and cult-like tendencies?

On the one hand, several aspects of nineteenth-century culture and religion that contributed to the rise of numerous cults continue to this day. We remain a hyper-individualistic culture that is attracted to populist ideals. We have retained our deep suspicion of all traditional authorities, including the church and her creeds. Within the church, the cry "*No creed but Christ*" (which, ironically, is itself a creed) has not lost any of its emotional appeal. Overly pietistic tendencies in the church continue to encourage the idea of a conflict between the heart and the mind resulting in antagonism toward anything doctrinal or intellectual. These basic misunderstandings led to a severe lack of discernment in the nineteenth century, and to the degree that the same misunderstandings continue today, so too do the same dangers.

The anti-intellectual trend that existed in the nineteenth century picked up steam in the twentieth. We have witnessed the "dumbing down" of our culture. The advent of television, as Neil Postman explains, by itself contributed greatly to the transition from an "Age of Exposition" to the "Age of Show Business" (*Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Penguin Books, 1985, p. 64). The dumbing down of the culture has been followed by the dumbing down of the church. Sadly, many churches have surrendered to the standards of contemporary culture and become places of entertainment rather than places of worship.





# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



## *Modern Cultic Tendencies*

*Continued from Page 4*

Deeply exegetical and theological sermons have become an endangered species, having been replaced by vacuous therapeutic messages and mindless pop-psychology. In the eighth century B.C., the prophet Hosea declared the word of the Lord to Israel, saying: *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”* (Hosea 4:6). Such a lament is not inappropriate in today’s anti-intellectual climate in which many Christians have lost the ability to think.

The antipathy and antagonism toward theology that began to gain ground in the nineteenth century also strengthened during the twentieth century. Some continued to argue that theology was detrimental to true “heart religion,” while others began to argue that language about God was simply impossible. Gradually theology moved from the center to the periphery of the church’s life. Christians are no longer regularly taught the foundational truths of the Christian faith and are therefore left vulnerable to cultists and others who cleverly twist Scripture.

As David F. Wells has observed, there is no place for theology where there is no place for truth, and one aspect of contemporary culture in which there is certainly no place for truth is what has been termed *“postmodernism.”* Postmodernism is difficult to define briefly, but it involves a number of movements in art, architecture, literature, and such that are identified by their rejection of modernism, or *“the Enlightenment project,”* and its appeals to universal norms. *“The animating spirit of postmodernism,”* as Gertrude Himmelfarb has observed, *“is radical individualism and skepticism that rejects any idea of truth, knowledge, or objectivity.”* Obviously, those who reject the idea of objective truth will not be able to discern truth from error. The extreme relativism and irrationalism of post-modern culture is found throughout the church today.

It is important to take into account not only important intellectual realities, but also technological innovations that have dramatically altered our cultural landscape. One such important technological advance is the Internet. In the nineteenth century, if a person wanted to propagate his teachings, he could find places to speak, or he could attempt to have them published and distributed more widely. Without radio or recording devices, the audience for public speaking was normally limited to those actually present (that is, unless someone transcribed the spoken message). If one desired to publish his teachings, he generally had to find a publisher willing to publish his work. In other words, the fact that a person had something he wanted to say to as many people as possible did not mean that he would be able to do so.

Not so today. The Internet has given a printing press to everyone with access to a computer. With the Internet, there are no publishers or editors who decide what will and will not be published. On the one hand, this has provided numerous opportunities for those with good and substantive material to make that material available to a wider audience. But it also provides a way for any cult to propagate falsehood. And the Internet does not discriminate. One can find the works of a Calvin or a Warfield on the same computer that one finds the works of a Joseph Smith or a John Shelby Spong. The user of the Internet alone must discern truth from error, but in the current relativistic and anti-intellectual climate, such discernment is rare.

The Internet has made it far easier for cult leaders, schismatics, and theological mavericks to spread their message. Those with hyper-individualistic and cultic tendencies can set up shop on the Web and spread their messages around the world. Today, older cults such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses have professionally-designed web sites.



# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



## *Modern Cultic Tendencies*

*Continued from Page 5*

Theological mavericks of every stripe have set up web sites of varying quality espousing their mutually contradictory interpretations of Scripture. Many of these schismatics use their web sites to set themselves up autonomously as little cyber-popes, regularly pronouncing anathemas on any and all who would dare disagree with any of their idiosyncratic and unbiblical opinions.

There have always been wolves in sheep's clothing. However, the anti-intellectual and anti-theological climate in today's world has made it more difficult for the sheep to tell the difference between wolves and other sheep, and technological advances such as the Internet have made it much easier for the wolves to infiltrate and harm the flock.

In order to counter these realities, the church must first be aware of the dangers. The church must then work to change the patterns of thought that contribute to the spread of cults and cultic tendencies. The church must reject irrational anti-intellectualism and embrace the God whose word is truth. Christians must regain both the desire and the ability to think—loving God with all of their heart and mind. Christians must reject the idea that theology is unimportant, for those who share this opinion are easy targets for cults and other forms of falsehood. Christians must reject the hyper-individualism that has run rampant in the church for centuries. The church is a communion of saints, not an army of one. Apart from the church and its doctrine, its prayer, its worship, and its sacraments, we are easy prey. As members of Christ's body, the church, we must prayerfully support one another and grow in discernment in order that we may recognize the subtle deceptions of the enemy whenever and wherever those deceptions may be found. ~ *Dr. Keith A. Mathison - professor of systematic theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla*

## *Discerning the Body - Devotional*

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 are crucial for an understanding of the proper observance of the Lord's Supper. Paul writes these words because abuses are occurring in the observance of the Supper at the church in Corinth, and Paul intends to correct those abuses. It has come to his attention that their practice of the Supper is undermining its very nature and purpose. As verses 17–22 indicate, there are divisions among the people coming to the Supper, and the more wealthy members of the church are behaving in a contemptuous manner toward those in the church who are poorer.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the true nature of the Lord's Supper in verses 23–26 by recounting Christ's words of institution given on the night He was betrayed. They were to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of Christ. To "*remember*" in this context is more than mere subjective mental recollection. By remembering, partakers of the Passover were reminded that they were one with those who were brought out of Egypt in the exodus. By remembering, partakers of the Lord's Supper are reminded that we are one with the disciples in the upper room. When we eat this bread and drink this wine we, the one body of Christ, proclaim His death until He comes (v. 26).



# *West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church*



## *Discerning the Body - Devotional* *Continued from Page 6*

In verses 27–32, Paul explains to the Corinthians that their divisions and their contempt for the poor at the Lord’s Supper amount to eating and drinking in an unworthy manner, and those who do this are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Such people eat and drink judgment to themselves because they are not discerning the Lord’s body. They do not take into account that the congregation is the body of Christ and that it shares in His death by virtue of its union with Him.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to examine themselves before partaking of the Supper. Do we do this today? Do we examine our hearts? Do we examine our motives? According to Paul, we must. We must not shame the poor when we observe the Lord’s Supper. If we do, we are not coming together for blessing, but for judgment (v. 34). We must observe the Supper as the unified body of Christ in order that we might truly proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes again. ~ *Dr. Keith A. Mathison - professor of systematic theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla*

### *Mercy for the Impetuous*

Peter didn’t just blow it, he blew it badly. *“Though they all fall away...I will never fall away”* (Matthew 26:33). Peter’s resolution we admire for its confidence and bravery. But it is a statement relying on one’s own strength and it is doomed for shipwreck. A few hours go by and we find him alone and weeping (v. 75).

We can relate, can’t we? We’ve made promise after promise to the Lord, resolution after resolution, only to come to the end of ourselves. The sinking feeling churns in our stomach, our earlier words of bold resolve pour like fuel on the fire of guilt and self-condemnation.

Godly sorrow doesn’t remove the sting of sin’s consequence. Falling short of the glory of God every day in word, thought, and deed is the norm, not the exception (Romans 3:23). We may be surprised when we blow it, but our sins do not surprise the omniscient, holy God.

So often we want to hide from the Lord when we sin. Yet after Peter’s very public failure, he doesn’t hide. He waits. Notice what Peter did when he heard it was Jesus on the beach. His exuberance leaps off the pages of the Bible when we read how he throws himself into the water and swims to shore (John 21:7).

Peter’s interaction with Jesus instructs us on biblical restoration. It was Jesus who restored Peter. It was Jesus who knew He would bring Peter back to a place of useful service (Luke 22:31–32). In fact, Jesus knew Peter’s journey through this dark path would only bring greater fruit as he ministered to those around him. The remarkable trials the first-century church faced required humble, God-dependent leaders who knew their strength rested not within themselves. *“God is more willing to pardon than to punish. Mercy does more multiply in Him than sin in us. Mercy is His nature”* (Thomas Watson, All Things for Good).

The impetuous disciple resolved to be faithful, but his stumbling has served Christians for millennia who have looked at that event in Peter’s life and found the comfort coming from a God of mercy. The Lord overrules our frailty, restores the fallen, and grows His church. ~ *Chris Larson—President and chief executive officer - Ligonier*



# West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



*Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

If you have a December 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 contact Walt or e-mail him at [gwlcf10415@gmail.com](mailto:gwlcf10415@gmail.com).

## *Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner December 2022*

### Birthdays

*Terrye B. (4)*  
*Laird E. (4)*  
*Katie G. (9)*  
*Auden Douglas T. (12)*  
*Jennifer A. (13)*  
*Wilma S. (16)*

*Scott T. (19)*  
*John M. (21)*  
*Cheryl P. (22)*  
*Jessica T. (23)*  
*Andrew K. (31)*

### Anniversaries

*John and Teresa H. (1)*  
*Malcolm and Amber H. (14)*  
*John and LeAnn M. (22)*

He is intangible and invisible. But His work is more powerful than the most ferocious wind. The Spirit brings order out of chaos and beauty out of ugliness. He can transform a sin-blistered man into a paragon of virtue. The Spirit changes people. The Author of life is also the Transformer of life.

We are called to live *Coram Deo*, defined as: before the presence of God, under the authority of God and to the glory of God. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



***West Suffolk Baptist Church  
Leadership***

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