



Volume 10 Issue 1

West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



January 2023

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

What does it mean to “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’” (Matthew 5:37)?

In the verses that precede Matthew 5:37, Jesus said that you're not to swear by heaven or earth, and James 5:12 echoes that as well. The Pharisees were trying to play an end-run game and not use the name of God. Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and other passages say that if you swear by God's name and fail to do what you are swearing, then there would be condemnation upon you. To swear by heaven or earth is a spiritual-sounding way to get around using God's name such that it gives you an escape clause to not carry out what you are pledging to do. Jesus said to let your “Yes” be “Yes” and your “No” be “No” so that there would be an integrity about your word and the commitments you make.

There can be exceptions to the rule. For example, if you were to say to your child, “I am going to take you to play golf tomorrow,” and it snows the next day, then the changes in circumstances make it reasonable that you would not play golf in subfreezing weather in a snowstorm. Circumstances changing can have a certain effect, but by and large, you should be a person of integrity.

Psalms 15 and Psalm 24 both pose the question, “*Who may come to the Lord's holy hill, and who may come into fellowship with God?*” Interestingly enough, there are only five or six distinguishing marks of the one who is welcomed into God's presence to have fellowship with Him. One of those distinguishing marks is that you do not swear with deceit. You do not present something to someone falsifying your commitment so that you have an escape.

There are many verses that need to be brought to bear upon answering the question, but the idea is that you would not change your word for personal gain, that you would be willing even to suffer if the commitment you made is now going to cost you more than you realized. ~ *Dr. Steven J. Lawson*

God Is Always at Work for Us and for Our Good

Psalms 18 is a psalm of David, a song celebrating “the day when the Lord rescued him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.” This psalm, the longest of Book One, praises God for His deliverance. It is also recorded, with slight differences, in 2 Samuel 22. At the center of this psalm is a strong confession of faith: “With the merciful you show yourself merciful” (Psalm 18:25).

This psalm begins (vv. 1–6) and ends (vv. 46–50) with praise offered to God. It is praise filled with love and thanksgiving for God's protection from enemies and from death. The praise rejoices in the victories God has given His king and His people—victories displayed before the world.



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The central section of the psalm (vv. 20–29) celebrates the faithfulness of David and of God. David served the Lord with integrity (we will look at the difficulties that seem to surround this kind of claim below). The Lord on His part had always been reliable and blessed His king. On each side of this central meditation on faithfulness we have the record of God’s powerful help for David (vv. 7–19; 30–45). Each of these two sections has its own character. Verses 7–19 emphasize the work of God to save David. Verses 30–45 highlight David’s success as God worked through him.

In light of this overview of the psalm’s structure, we want to look more closely at several points. **First**, how can David claim to be blameless (vv. 20–24)? The claim of blamelessness is a recurring theme in the Psalms. It is stated with special force in Psalm 26:

Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness. I do not sit with men of falsehood, nor do I consort with hypocrites” (Psalm 26:1–4).

But David is a murderer and an adulterer, to name only some of his sins. How can he claim to be blameless?

We need to recognize that David was a devoted and persevering follower of the Lord even though he did fall into very serious sin. When Nathan confronted him with his sins, he repented and grieved deeply for them. He expressed his repentance in beautiful psalms of penitence such as Psalms 32 and 51. His life as a whole was characterized by his faithful keeping of God’s covenant in obedience and repentance.

What David pleads, then, is not absolute moral perfection. He recognized that by such a standard he would never stand: *“Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you”* (Psalm 143:2). Rather, he pleads his faithfulness in comparison to the wickedness of those who hate God and His king. He makes this comparison not to claim that he deserves or has earned God’s favor, but to show that God’s saving grace has really made him different from the wicked in the ways in which he thinks, believes, and lives. David loves the Lord and His law, so his sin is grievous to him and he willingly repents and seeks to lead a godly life. In contrast, the wicked despise God and His holy law. They ignore God and seek in every way to harm their neighbor.

Again, David is not claiming that his perfect righteousness earns him God’s favor. Rather, he says God has brought him into His covenant and given him the integrity that he has. It is *“God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless”* (Psalm 18:32). He belongs to God and follows God and therefore knows that God will be kind to him. It is not the self-righteous whom the Lord saves, but the humble: *“For you save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down”* (Psalm 18:27). All his strength comes from the Lord (v. 1) and the faith or trust of the psalmist always turns to the Lord for help (Psalm 18:2; cf. Psalm 26:1: *“I have trusted in the LORD without wavering”*). The foundation of God’s care for David is not David’s deserving, but the Lord’s election: *“He rescued me, because he delighted in me”* (Psalm 18:19).



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While David wrote this psalm and had every right to sing it in his faithfulness, once again we see the psalm drawing our minds beyond David to one greater and purer than David. This psalm belongs more to the Christ, who was fully blameless in every way, than to David. Paul demonstrates this in his use of this psalm in Romans 15:8–9. He writes:

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." (Romans 15:8–9)

In citing Psalm 18:49, Paul shows that it speaks of Jesus at least as much as it does of David. Indeed, even David can claim covenantal integrity only as he is in Christ.

Another feature of this psalm is the vivid picture of God's coming to David's rescue (vv. 7–15). David cried out for help (v. 6) and the Lord answered. *"He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind"* (Psalm 18:9–10). The fury of the Lord shook the earth (vv. 7, 15) and thunder and lightning preceded him (vv. 12–14). Hot smoke poured forth from his nostrils and fire from his mouth (vv. 8, 15). Here is a marvelous picture of the power and determination of God to save. But when in David's life did this happen? As we scan Old Testament history, we can find no such episode. Something like this happened when the Lord met with Israel at Mount Sinai, but nothing close to it happened in David's experience.

The explanation is, of course, that David is speaking poetically here. He records not what he saw with his physical eyes, but what his eyes of faith saw happen. Although this awesome power of God usually remains hidden from view, it is absolutely real, and it is exercised for the well-being of His people. God is always working powerfully and passionately for His people even when we do not see it. David's poetic imagery shows us more than eyes can see.

This truth is taught over and over again in the Bible. We need to have it taught repeatedly because we are so inclined to think that only the visible is real. Think of the experience of Elisha. He sat in Dothan apparently defenseless against the strength of the king of Aram. When his servant panicked, Elisha replied, *"Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them"* (2 Kings 6:16). And then to comfort his servant further, Elisha prayed and God did an amazing thing. *"Then Elisha prayed and said, 'O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.' So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha"* (2 Kings 6:17). Elisha had never been in any danger, for the Lord was on his side.

We see something similar when the authorities came to arrest Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus appeared weak and defenseless. Peter, in a panic, tried to protect Him with a sword.



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Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:52–53)

Jesus submitted to arrest not because He was helpless, but because He accepted the Father’s will for His death and our redemption.

This psalm reminds all of us that God is always at work for us and for our good. In the New Testament, the Apostle John makes the same point: *“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). We do not need to fear, for God will save us in His good time. We should praise God for His mercy and help as this psalm does. ~ **Dr. W. Robert Godfrey**

Learning Contentment

I spoke with a close friend who had gone through a period marked by personal disappointments, discouragements, unfair treatment, and even false rumors about his character and Christian service. I was moved and impressed by his response: “My great consolation is simply this,” he said, *“Godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Timothy 6:6).

This is truly a Christian reaction to adversity (which is the context in which spiritual contentment is most deeply tested, as well as best manifested).

Such contentment is never the result of the momentary decision of the will. It cannot be produced merely by having a well-ordered and thought-through time-and life-management plan calculated to guard us against unexpected twists of divine providence. No, true contentment means embracing the Lord’s will in every aspect of His providence simply because it is His providence. It involves what we are in our very being, not just what we do and can accomplish.

Doing and Being

Contentment is an undervalued grace. As in the seventeenth century, when Jeremiah Burroughs wrote his great work on this theme, so today it remains The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. If it could be produced by programmed means (“Five steps to contentment in a month”), it would be commonplace. Instead, Christians must discover contentment the old-fashioned way: we must learn it.

Thus, we cannot “do” contentment. It is taught by God. We need to be schooled in it. It is part of the process of being transformed through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1-2). It is commanded of us, but, paradoxically, it is created in us, not done by us. It is not the product of a series of actions, but of a renewed and transformed character. It involves the growth of a good tree that produces good fruit.



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Learning Contentment *Continued from Page 4*

This seems to be a difficult principle for Christians today to grasp. Clear directives for Christian living are essential for us. But, sadly, much of the heavily programmatic teaching current in evangelicalism places such a premium on external doing and achieving that character development is set at a discount. We live in the most pragmatic society on earth (if anyone can “do it,” we can). It is painful to pride to discover that the Christian life is not rooted in what we can do, but in what we need done to us.

Knowing First

Years ago, I had a somewhat painful encounter with this “tell us and we’ll do it” mentality. Halfway through a Christian students’ conference where I was speaking on the assigned theme “Knowing Christ,” I was summoned to meet with a deputation of staff members who seemed to feel duty-bound to confront me with the inadequacies of my first two expositions of Scripture.

“You have addressed us for two hours,” they complained, “and yet, you have not told us one single thing to do.”

Impatience to be doing hid impatience with the Apostolic principle that it is only in knowing Christ that we can do anything (Philippians 3:10; 4:13) - or so it seemed to me at the time.

How does all this apply to contentment?

Christian contentment means that my satisfaction is independent of my circumstances. When Paul speaks about his own contentment in Philippians 4:11, he uses a term commonplace among the ancient Greek philosophical schools of the Stoics and Cynics. In their vocabulary, contentment meant self-sufficiency, in the sense of independence from changing circumstances.

But for Paul, contentment was rooted not in self-sufficiency but in Christ’s sufficiency (Philippians 4:13). Paul said that he could do all things—both being abased and abounding—in Christ.

Don’t skip over that last phrase. This kind of contentment is the fruit of an ongoing, intimate, deeply developed relationship with Him.

To use Paul’s terms, contentment is something we have to learn. And here is the crux of the matter: to learn it, we must enroll in the divine school in which we are instructed by biblical teaching and providential experience.

A good sampler of the lessons learned in this school is found in Psalm 131.

A Biblical Example

In Psalm 131, the psalmist gives us a vivid description of what it means to learn contentment. He portrays his experience in terms of a child being weaned from a milk diet onto solid food:



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Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters. Nor with things too profound for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever.

To picture the scene and hear the sounds best, you need to remember that in Old Testament times weaning sometimes did not take place until a child was 3 or even 4 years old! It is hard enough for a mother to cope with an infant's dissatisfied cries, the refusal of solid food, and the struggle of wills during the weaning process. Imagine battling with a 4-year-old! That was the measure of the struggle David went through before he learned contentment.

But what was the struggle all about? David helps us by suggesting the two great issues that needed to be settled in his life.

Holy Ambition

“Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty” (Psalm 131:1). Ambition in and of itself is not necessarily wrong. David had been set apart for the throne, after all (1 Samuel 16:12-13). But he had a higher ambition: to trust God's wise providing, placing, and timing.

There had been occasions when David could have seized position and power by means that would have compromised his commitment to the Lord. **First**, Saul came into the very cave where David and his men were hiding (1 Samuel 24:3ff). Later, David and Abishai crept into Saul's tent and found him asleep (1 Samuel 26:7ff). On either occasion, he so easily could have captured or even killed Saul—who had become his enemy. After all, was he not the anointed future king? But David was content to live by the directives of God's Word and to wait patiently for God's time.

Christian contentment, therefore, is the direct fruit of having no higher ambition than to belong to the Lord and to be totally at His disposal in the place He appoints, at the time He chooses, with the provision He is pleased to make.

It was with mature wisdom, then, that the young Robert Murray McCheyne wrote, *“It has always been my aim, and it is my prayer, to have no plans with regard to myself.”* *“How unusual!”* we say. Yes, but what people noticed about McCheyne was how content he was to pursue one driving ambition: to know Christ (Philippians 3:10). It is not accidental that when we make Christ our ambition we discover that He becomes our sufficiency and we learn contentment in all circumstances.



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False Preoccupations

“Neither do I concern myself with great matters . . . things too profound for me” (Psalm 131:1). Contentment is the fruit of a mindset that understands its limitations.

David did not allow himself to be preoccupied with what God was not pleased to give to him. Neither did he allow his mind to become fixated on things God had not been pleased to explain to him.

Such preoccupations suffocate contentment. If I insist on knowing exactly what God is doing and what He plans to do with my future, if I demand to understand His ways with me in the past, I can never be content until I am equal with God. How slow we are to recognize in these subtle mental temptations the echoes of the serpent of Eden: *“Express your dissatisfaction with God’s ways, God’s words, God’s provision. Take what He has forbidden. He does not really love you, so take it! And take it now while you have the chance!”*

In our Augustinian tradition, it has often been said that the first sin was superbia, pride. But it was more complex than that; it included discontentment. A discontented spirit is both the fruit and the evidence of an ungodly heart.

Keep these principles in view and you will not easily be caught up in a this-worldly vortex of discontentment. Go back to the school in which you will make progress in being a Christian. Study your lessons, settle the issue of ambition, make Christ your preoccupation—and you will learn to enjoy the privileges of being truly content.
~ *Dr. Sinclair Ferguson*

The Bible Belongs to Every Age

In 1734 and 1735, Jonathan Edwards and the congregation at Northampton experienced a revival. So did many other churches in the Connecticut River Valley in the colonies of Connecticut and Massachusetts. In the fall of 1733, Edwards preached some hard-hitting sermons. One of them, preached in November 1733, has been titled “The Kind of Preaching People Want.” Edwards starts his sermon in the Old Testament, observing that God’s people have had no shortage of false prophets, “that always flattered them in their sins.” True prophets rebuke the sinner. False prophets leave sinners “to the peaceable enjoyment of their sins.” He then turns to the desire that people in his own day had for such false prophets. Edwards continues, “If ministers were sent to tell the people that they might gratify their lusts without danger... how eagerly would they be listened to by some, and what good attention they would give.” He adds, “They would like a savior to save them in their sins much better than a savior to save them from their sins.”



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The Bible Belongs to Every Age

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Edwards was responding to those of his day who thought they knew better than the Word of God. He also wrote treatises to respond to the academics who thought they knew better than God’s Word. The English academic world of Edwards’ day was enthralled with the new thinking of the Enlightenment. The deists ruled. They believed that God created the world and then backed away, and now He lets it run along all on its own. They rejected the idea that God reveals His will in His Word. They rejected the doctrine of the incarnation and the deity of Christ. They rejected the possibility, let alone the actual occurrence, of miracles. They had “come of age.” The Enlightenment thinkers and the deists were far too sophisticated to submit to some ancient book.

The philosophers had affected the church. In 1727, a group of independent ministers met in London to debate the deity of Christ. These were the exact descendants of the stalwart Puritans of the 1600s. They voted on the deity of Christ, and the deity of Christ lost. These were men who should have known better. They capitulated to the whims of the day.

Edwards kept up with these developments. He was not a backwoods minister. He had the latest books and kept current with the latest ideas. He saw where these ideas would take the church in the American Colonies. He sounded the alarm. He also saw how his congregation could be so easily led astray by the wrong pursuits. He saw how worldliness crouched at the door, ready to overtake those who so willingly gave in.

So, he was not in a Puritan bubble. He responded to his culture and to his congregation. He preached sermons and he wrote books—all defending the Bible.

We are not historically situated at the dawn of the Enlightenment as Edwards was. We find our place at the Enlightenment’s setting sun. We live in the dawn of postmodernism. We live among those who reject the Bible. We live among those who give in to the clutches of worldliness. Sin crouches at our door too.

So what pastoral counsel did Edwards offer? He pointed his congregation to the Bible. He argued against the Enlightenment thinkers and against the deist theologians based on the Bible. He looked to the Word.



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The Bible Belongs to Every Age

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As Edwards noted, the Bible belongs to every age. It is not simply the true Word for the first century. It is not simply the authoritative Word for the first century. It is not simply the necessary Word for the first century. It is not simply the sufficient Word for the first century.

It is the true, authoritative, necessary, clear, and sufficient Word for all centuries, including the twenty-first. Theologians sometimes speak of these as the attributes of Scripture. As the attributes of God help us to learn about God, the attributes of Scripture help us learn about Scripture. The first and foremost attribute of Scripture is its authority. Scripture is authoritative. We again hear Peter Martyr Vermigli remind us that it all comes down to *“Thus says the Lord.”* If Scripture is the Word of God, it’s authoritative. ~ **Dr. Stephen J. Nichols**

Adopting Christ's Attitude

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on the cross!” (Philippians 2:4–8, NIV).

Here the attribute of glory is ascribed to all three members of the Trinity. This glory is then confirmed as a glory that is eternal. It is not something added to or acquired by Jesus at some point in His earthly life and ministry. He held this glory at the beginning and will possess it for eternity:

“Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11, NIV).

Though the form of servanthood covered Jesus and His life was marked by a willing humiliation, nevertheless there were moments in His ministry where the glory of His deity burst through. It was these moments that provoked John to write, *“And we beheld His glory”* (John 1:14). ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in January 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.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner January 2023

Birthdays

Rick G. (1)

Corissa A. (3)

Marci S. (9)

Jack B. (24)

Muriel R. (24)

Stephen H. (26)

Anniversaries

None to Report

The book of James has an unusual sentence construction that links the word glory with the name of Jesus: “*My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality*” (James 2:1). In this verse the words “*Lord of glory*” have alternate renditions. Some translations read, “*Our glorious Lord.*” Still another possible translation reads, “*Jesus Christ, who is the glory.*”

B. B. Warfield, in his book *The Lord of Glory*, says, that Jesus was the glory of God, the shekinah. According to the Old Testament, the shekinah was the visible manifestation of the invisible God. The shekinah was a radiant cloud or brilliant light within a cloud that signaled the immediate presence of God. For Jesus to be identified with the shekinah was to be equated with the presence of God Himself. In Jesus we see the full manifestation of the majesty of God.

That the New Testament writers ascribed glory to Jesus was a clear indication of their confession of His full deity. Glory, in the sense it is used with reference to Jesus, is a divine attribute. It is the glory of God that He refuses to share with any man.



***West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership***

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