



Volume 10 Issue 7

West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Why are there Four Different Gospels?

It is clear to any reader of the Gospels that they are different. Sometimes the events are in a different order (John has the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and Mark has it at the end). Sometimes they differ in their details (such as the names of the apostles or the names in the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3). Sometimes there are differences in what they cover (so many of the events in John are not in any of the other three). Why is this the case?

Our tendency in approaching the Gospels is to think of them as modern biography. We want them to give us all of the facts about Jesus and especially to get the chronology of his life right. We in our culture have a tremendous interest in order and detail. Judged by these standards, the Gospels fare poorly indeed.

Yet the Gospel writers did not set out to write modern biography. They did not even know about it or realize that people would be interested in such issues in hundreds of years. What they did know about was ancient biography. The point of such works was not to give a chronology of a life but to present selected facts so as to bring out the significance of the person's life and the moral points that the reader should draw from it. One would see this quickly if one read, for example, Plutarch's Lives. Each life is so presented as to bring out a moral for the reader. This ancient literature is closer to what the Gospel writers were doing than what we now call biographies. The way the Gospel writers wrote was quite understandable to the readers of their time.

Thus the Evangelists set about to present selected events from the life of Jesus with a purpose. John makes his purpose quite plain: "*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (John 20:30–31). Of the other Gospels, Mark and Luke have a similar purpose of evangelism. Matthew, as part of his purpose, also appears to include church instruction, for he arranges the sayings of Jesus into five large discourses on topics useful for the church.

Each Gospel was aimed at a different audience. If tradition is correct, Mark records the preaching of Peter in Rome. That is, it is directed to a largely Gentile audience. Luke addresses his Gospel to a person who appears to be a Gentile official (Luke 1:1–4). Nobody knows who this person was (or whether Theophilus [lover of God] is a generic name for any God-loving person who would read the book), yet the two-volume Luke-Acts appears to have as part of its purpose the defense of the Christian faith before Gentile leaders (perhaps even the defense of Paul). This is not the same type of general audience that Mark addresses. Matthew, on the other hand, appears to have a Jewish-Christian or Jewish audience in view. John speaks to yet another audience. Naturally, even the same preacher does not use the same "sermon" for different audiences.

Furthermore, the writers of the various Gospels were different people. The writer of John takes a Judean perspective on Jesus and mentions only a few events that took place in Galilee, while the other Gospels focus far more on Galilee and other non-Judean locations. The writers also had different interests. Luke is very much concerned about issues such as the use of money and possessions, the acceptance of women by Jesus, and prayer. Matthew, on the other hand, is quite interested in Jesus' relationship to the Jewish law.



West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



Why are there Four Different Gospels?

Continued from Page 1

Mark includes very little teaching of Jesus, so his focus is more on what Jesus did. Some of these were personal interests of the author, and some of these were concerns they had because of their intended audiences.

It is also important to look at the length of the Gospels. Matthew, Luke and John are long enough that if they were any longer they would have to go to two volumes. Scrolls only came in certain lengths, and they are at the maximum length. Thus when they use material from Mark they must at times abbreviate if they are not going to have to leave other material of their own out.

The rules of biography writing at that time did not dictate that one had to put everything in chronological order. Mark may have a rough chronology, but the others feel free to group things together by other rules of organization. Luke puts much of the teaching of Jesus within the context of a trip from Galilee to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–19:10, the so-called “travel narrative”). Yet he also has the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6. Matthew groups much of this same teaching into his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, including both material found in the Sermon on the Plain and material found in Luke’s “travel narrative.” These two Gospels have two different frameworks for presenting some of the same material. They are shaped by concerns of the respective authors. Luke is quite interested in geographical movement, Galilee to Jerusalem (and then in Acts, Jerusalem to Rome), while Matthew is more interested in Jesus’ fulfillment of Moses imagery. Interestingly enough, both Matthew and Luke use Mark, but they tend to use Mark in blocks. Luke edits Mark more than Matthew (partially because Luke is more concerned with Greek style and Mark is fairly rough in that regard).

John is different. He does not tell so many stories about Jesus. Instead he selects seven signs to present, seven specific miracles (although he knows that Jesus worked many other miracles). He does not give a lot of short sayings of Jesus, but groups what Jesus said into longer discourses in which it is difficult to tell where Jesus leaves off speaking and where John begins speaking (in the original manuscripts there were no quotation marks or other punctuation or even word divisions).

The point is that, as was the case in ancient biography, the Gospels are not photographs of Jesus but portraits. In a portrait it is important to bring out an accurate likeness, but the painter can also put in other things he or she sees in the person: perhaps some feature of their character will be brought out or some deed they did or office they held. Perhaps the person sat for the portrait in a bare studio, and then the painter painted a scene surrounding them that would bring out this feature of the person. We do not say that the portrait is inaccurate. We know that that is what a portrait is supposed to do. In fact, in some ways it is more accurate than the photograph, for it allows us to see things that could never be shown in a photograph (such as character), but are very much part of the person.

In the Gospels, then, we have four portraits of Jesus. Each of the four writers is concerned with different aspects of his life and person. This was symbolized early in church history when the Gospels were identified with different images. John was identified with the eagle, while Luke was identified with a human being. Mark was identified with an ox, and Matthew with a lion (for royalty). (The images are drawn from Revelation 4:7.) We are therefore not limited to one perspective on Jesus, but have the richness of four.



West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



Why are there Four Different Gospels? Continued from Page 2

This is why it is important to read each Gospel for itself rather than combine them into a harmony. A harmony tries to put all of the four Gospels together to make one story, but in doing this it loses the perspective of the Gospels. It is like taking bits and pieces out of four portraits and trying to make one collective portrait from them. The harmony satisfies our desire to get everything in order, but in doing this it often distorts the Gospels. In the end, the harmony is not what God chose to inspire. God chose to inspire four Gospels, not one single authorized biography. In other words, God appears to have wanted four pictures of Jesus, not one, four messages for the church, not just a single message.

It is not that the four portraits are contradictory. They are just different. If four painters sat and painted the same sunset, each would have a different picture. Each would leave out or put in different details. Each would have a different perspective and perhaps select a different phase of the setting sun to emphasize. None of them would be “wrong,” for each was portraying the same sunset.

Thus when we come to the Gospels the differences are important. When we find a difference we need to ask why this Gospel is different. Some differences are quite insignificant. For example, Mark 6:39 mentions that the grass was green and none of the other Gospels have this detail. They could leave out such a detail and save space. Others are significant. When Matthew reports Jesus’ word on divorce (Matthew 19:9), he only speaks of a man divorcing a woman, for in Jewish law only men could divorce. When Mark speaks of this (Mark 10:11–12), he speaks of both men divorcing women and women men, for in Rome either sex could divorce. Each reflects the same truth Jesus was saying (probably in Aramaic, not Greek) in tune with the legal system their audience lives under. Each accurately portrays Jesus’ concern for the permanence of marriage. Likewise Matthew reports the order of the temptations so that they end up on a mountain, in accordance with his interest in Jesus as the new Moses (Matthew 4:1–11), and Luke puts them in an order so Jesus would end up in Jerusalem, in harmony with his Galilee to Jerusalem interest (Luke 4:1–13). Neither claims to have their material in chronological order, so maintaining such an order is not an issue.

Each of the Gospels is trying to deliver a particular message to us. The important issue for us as readers is not that we get the life of Jesus figured out with each event in order, but that we get the message the Gospels are trying to communicate, that we hear their call to faith, that we submit to the teaching of Jesus, and that we live in the discipleship that they are trying to call us to. In the end, we are not called to be art critics, but to fill our homes with the “glow” that comes from these four portraits. ~ *Walter C. Kaiser - American Evangelical OT Scholar - Former President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-Hard Sayings of the Bible*



West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



How to Profit from Reading the Puritans

Here are *nine* ways you can grow spiritually by reading Puritan literature today:

1. **Puritan writings help shape life by Scripture.** The Puritans loved, lived, and breathed Holy Scripture. They also relished the power of the Spirit that accompanied the Word. Rarely can you open a Puritan book and not find its pages filled with Scripture references; their books are all Word centered. More than 90 percent of their writings are repackaged sermons rich with scriptural exposition. The Puritan writers truly believed in the sufficiency of Scripture for life and godliness.

If you read the Puritans regularly, their Bible-centeredness will become contagious. These writings will teach you to yield wholehearted allegiance to the Bible's message. Like the Puritans, you will become a believer of the Living Book, echoing the truth of John Flavel (1628–1691), who said, *“The Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering, and the most comfortable way of dying.”* [Cited in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, U.K.: Evangelical Press, 2006), 49.]

2. **Puritan writings show how to integrate biblical doctrine into daily life.** Cornelis Pronk wrote, *“The Puritan’s concern...was primarily ethical or moral rather than abstractly doctrinal.”* [Cornelis Pronk, “Puritan Christianity,” *The Messenger* (March 1997): 5.] The Puritan writings express this emphasis in *three* ways:

First, they address your mind. In keeping with the Reformed tradition, the Puritans refused to set mind and heart against each other, but viewed the mind as the palace of faith. William Greenhill (1591–1671) stated, *“Ignorance is the mother of all errors.”* [William Greenhill, *Exposition on the Prophet of Ezekiel* (London: Samuel Holdsworth, 1839), 110.] The Puritans understood that a mindless Christianity fosters a spineless Christianity. An anti-intellectual gospel quickly becomes an empty, formless gospel that never gets beyond catering to felt needs. Puritan literature is a great help for understanding the vital connection between what we believe and how that affects the way we live.

Second, Puritan writings confront your conscience. Today many preachers are masterful at avoiding convicting people of sin, whereas the Puritans were masters at convicting us about the heinous nature of our sin against an infinite God. This is amply displayed in Ralph Venning's (c. 1622–1674) *The Sinfulness of Sin*. For example, Venning wrote: *“Sin is the dare of God’s justice, the rape of his mercy, the jeer of his patience, the slight of his power, the contempt of his love.”* [Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 32. Venning is citing Bunyan.]

The Puritans excelled at exposing specific sins, then asked questions to press home conviction of those sins. As one Puritan wrote, *“We must go with the stick of divine truth and beat every bush behind which a sinner hides, until like Adam who hid, he stands before God in his nakedness.”*



West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



How to Profit from Reading the Puritans *Continued from Page 4*

Devotional reading should be confrontational as well as comforting. We grow little if our consciences are not pricked daily and directed to Christ. Since we are prone to run for the bushes when we feel threatened, we need daily help to come before the living God, *“naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do”* (Hebrews 4:13). In this, the Puritans excelled. Owen wrote: *“Christ by his death destroying the works of the devil, procuring the Spirit for us, hath so killed sin, as to its reign in believers, that it shall not obtain its end and dominion.... Look on him under the weight of your sins, praying, bleeding, dying; bring him in that condition into thy heart of faith.”* [John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 6:85.]

Third, Puritan writers engage your heart. They feed the mind with solid biblical substance and they move the heart with affectionate warmth. They wrote out of love for God’s Word, love for the glory of God, and love for the souls of readers. They did this because their hearts were touched by God and they, in turn, longed for others to feel and experience salvation. As John Bunyan (1628–1688) exclaimed, *“O that they who have heard me speak this day did but see as I do what sin, death, hell, and the curse of God is; and also what the grace, and love, and mercy of God is, through Jesus Christ.”* [John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 1:42.]

3. Puritan writings show how to exalt Christ and see His beauty. The Puritan Thomas Adams (1583–1652) wrote: *“Christ is the sum of the whole Bible, prophesied, typified, prefigured, exhibited, demonstrated, to be found in every leaf, almost in every line, the Scriptures being but as it were the swaddling bands of the child Jesus.”* [Thomas Adams, *The Works of Thomas Adams* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1862), 3:224.]

The Puritans loved Christ and relished His beauty. The best example of this is probably Samuel Rutherford’s (1600–1661) *Letters*, which sing the sweetest canticles of the Savior. To an elder, Rutherford wrote, *“Christ, Christ, nothing but Christ, can cool our love’s burning languor. O thirsty love! Wilt thou set Christ, the well of life, to thy head, and drink thy fill? Drink, and spare not; drink love, and be drunken with Christ!”* [Samuel Rutherford, *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006), 173.] To another friend, he wrote, *“I have a lover Christ, and yet I want love for Him! I have a lovely and desirable Lord, who is love-worthy, and who beggeth my love and heart, and I have nothing to give Him! Dear brother, come further in on Christ, and see a new wonder, and heaven and earth’s wonder of love, sweetness, majesty, and excellency in Him.”* [Ibid., 426.] If you would know Christ better and love Him more fully, immerse yourself in Puritan literature.

4. Puritan writings highlight the Trinitarian character. The Puritans were driven by a deep sense of the infinite glory of a Triune God. Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) noted this doctrine should *“be allowed to be of as great importance in itself and its consequences, as any of our most distinguishing Christian principles.”* [Edmund Calamy, *Sermons Concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1722), 6.] When the Puritans said in the Shorter Catechism that man’s chief end was to glorify God, they meant the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They took Calvin’s glorious understanding of the unity of the Trinity in the Godhead, and showed how that worked out in electing, redeeming, and sanctifying love and grace in the lives of believers.



West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



How to Profit from Reading the Puritans *Continued from Page 5*

Owen wrote an entire book on the Christian believer's distinct communion with each Person in the Godhead—with God as Father, Jesus as Savior, and the Holy Spirit as Comforter. Samuel Rutherford echoed the conviction of many Puritans when he said that he did not know which divine person he loved the most, but he knew that he needed each of them and loved them all. The Puritans teach us how to remain God-centered while being vitally concerned about Christian experience so that we don't fall into the trap of glorifying experience for its own sake.

5. Puritan writings show how to handle trials. Puritanism grew out of a great struggle between the truth of God's Word and its enemies. Reformed Christianity was under attack in England at the time of the Puritans, even more than Reformed Christianity is under attack today. The Puritans were good soldiers in the conflict; they endured great hardships and suffered much. Their lives and writings arm us for battle and encourage us in suffering. The Puritans teach us how affliction is necessary to humble us (Deuteronomy 8:2), to teach us what sin is (Zephaniah 1:12), and to bring us back to God (Hosea 5:15).

Much of the comfort the Puritans offer grows out of the very nature of God. Henry Scougal (1650–1678) said of afflicted believers that it comforts them *“to remember that an unerring providence doth overrule all their seeming disorders, and makes them all serve to great and glorious designs.”* [Henry Scougal, *The Works of Henry Scougal* (New York: Robert Carter, 1846), 169.] And Thomas Watson (c. 1620–1686) declared, *“Afflictions work for good, as they conform us to Christ. God's rod is a pencil to draw Christ's image more lively upon us.”* Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 28.]

6. Puritan writings describe true spirituality. The Puritans stressed the spirituality of the law, the spiritual warfare against indwelling sin, the childlike fear of God, the wonder of grace, the art of meditation, the dreadfulness of hell, and the glories of heaven. If you want to live deeply as a Christian, read Oliver Heywood's *Heart Treasure*. Read the Puritans devotionally, then pray to be like them. Ask questions such as: Am I, like the Puritans, thirsting to glorify the triune God? Am I motivated by biblical truth and biblical fire? Do I share their view of the vital necessity of conversion and of being clothed with the righteousness of Christ? Do I follow the Puritans as they followed Christ? Does my life savor of true spirituality?

7. Puritan writings show how to live by holistic faith. The Puritans applied every subject they discussed to practical *“uses,”* which propel a believer into passionate, effective action for Christ's kingdom. In their daily lives they integrated Christian truth with covenant vision; they knew no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. Their writings can help you live in a way that centers on God. They will help you appreciate God's gifts and declare everything *“holiness to the Lord.”*

The Puritans excelled as covenant theologians. They lived that theology, covenanting themselves, their families, their churches, and their nations to God. Yet they did not fall into the error of *“hyper-covenantalism,”* in which the covenant of grace became a substitute for personal conversion. They promoted a comprehensive worldview that brought the whole gospel to bear on all of life, striving to bring every action in conformity with Christ, so that believers would mature and grow in faith. The Puritans wrote on practical subjects, such as how to pray, how to develop genuine piety, how to conduct family worship, and how to raise children for Christ.



West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



How to Profit from Reading the Puritans *Continued from Page 6*

In short, as J. I. Packer noted, they taught how to develop a “*rational, resolute, passionate piety [that is] conscientious without becoming obsessive, law-oriented without lapsing into legalism, and expressive of Christian liberty without any shameful lurches into license.*” [J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990), 24.]

8. Puritan writings teach the primacy of preaching. William Perkins (1558– 1602) explained why preaching is so critical: “*Through preaching those who hear are called into the state of grace, and preserved in it.*” [William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 7.] To the Puritans, preaching was the high point of public worship. “*It is no small matter to stand up in the face of a congregation, and deliver a message of salvation or damnation, as from the living God, in the name of our Redeemer,*” wrote Richard Baxter (1615–1691). [Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2001), 4:383.]

The Puritans taught that preaching must be expository and didactic, evangelistic and convicting, experiential and applicatory, powerful and plain in its presentation, ever respecting the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. For the Puritans, what transpired on Sabbath mornings and evenings was not merely a pep talk but was an encounter with God by the Spirit through the Word.

9. Puritan writings show how to live in two worlds. The Puritans said we should have heaven in our eye throughout our earthly pilgrimage. They took seriously the New Testament passages that say we must keep the hope of glory before our minds to guide and shape our lives here on earth. They viewed this life as “*the gymnasium and dressing room where we are prepared for heaven,*” teaching us that preparation for death is the first step in learning to truly live. [Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 13.]

These *nine* points are reason enough to demonstrate the benefit of reading the Puritans. We live in dark days where it seems the visible church in many areas around the globe, and particularly in the West, is floundering. Waning interest in doctrinal fidelity and a disinterest in holiness prevails in many Christians. The church’s ministry has been marginalized or ignored. The Puritans were in many ways ahead of their times. Their books address the problems of our day with a scriptural clarity and zeal that the church desperately needs.

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By Dr. Joel Beeke



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For a **Modern** Reformation

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South Korea Mission Update



Greetings from Daejeon!

We hope this finds all of you doing well in the Lord. By God's grace and mercy, our families are enjoying a season where troubles and trials are relatively few. Although time in these *plains of ease* is often brief, it is truly a gift from above for which we are grateful,

for which we praise and thank our Heavenly Father!

Sam finished his university Korean class May 16th and has been continuing his language and cultural studies personally and with the help of others. Sanghee, Joonha, and Sooha have been continuing with their weekly homeschool and extra curricular classes while also finding extra time to get outside and enjoy the spring weather. In addition to celebrating their 16th wedding anniversary June 12th, Sam and Sanghee are planning a few days of rest and refreshment for their family at the end of the month.

After three months, Taiuk and his family are feeling more and more settled into their new lives in the city and the church. Taiuk has finished a first and second draft Korean translation of Benjamin Keach's, *The Glory of a True Church* and has already begun a translation of Nehemiah Coxe's, *A Sermon Preached at The Ordination of An Elder and Deacons*. In addition to her responsibilities at home, Yujin has started taking college classes related to educating children with special needs. Somang, Roeh, and Raham have settled into their new school environment well and they are finding plenty of time to play in the evenings with Joonha and Sooha.

Thankfully, the Church is also enjoying a season of peace and unity among the remaining members. Alongside Pastor Park, we are continuing in the work of the reforming the church's ecclesiology. In addition to drafting a new church constitution and members covenant, over the summer we are editing and preparing for publication the two documents mentioned above, for use in our own congregation and with the hope that these documents will be used more broadly for the Reformed Baptist cause in Korea.

We can't thank our supporting churches and individuals enough! As of the end of May, the Lord has provided \$57,185 of our 2023 support thus far. Although our current situation isn't ideal, the Lord continues to provide for us, allowing us to do the good work he has called us to; for this we rejoice and Praise Him. Sam's support continues to come in month to month and this May marked the first month this year that Taiuk has been able to receive his partial monthly support. Presently we only have sufficient funds to cover Sam's support for the month of June. So our need for 2023 financial support remains urgent. Please continue to pray for the Lord to provide the remaining \$93,733 that is still needed. As always, thank you for remembering us, supporting us, and encouraging us!

The Lord reigns,
Sam and TK

Please Pray for Us!

- **Sam's cultural and language studies**
- **Sanghee, Joonha, and Sooha as they continue homeschooling through the summer**
- **Taiuk's translation work**
- **Yujin's studies and efforts to be a blessing to children in need**
- **Somang's, Roeh's, and Raham's healthy relationships at school**
- **The work of Pastor Park, Sam, and Taiuk to reform and rebuild NSRBC**
- **The congregation's unity and love for each other**
- **Sufficient funds to financially support Pastor Park and his family**
- **Sam and Taiuk's remaining 2023 support**



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

If you have a birthday or anniversary in July 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 gwlclfl0415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner July 2023

Birthdays

Sadie H. (13)
Elijah D. (16)
Jubilee H. (18)

Teresa H. (21)
Emily L. (25)
Nic G. (29)

Anniversaries

David and Jennifer A. (4)
Les and Jessica T. (17)

“When we understand the character of God, when we grasp something of His holiness, then we begin to understand the radical character of our sin and hopelessness. Helpless sinners can survive only by grace. Our strength is futile in itself; we are spiritually impotent without the assistance of a merciful God. We may dislike giving our attention to God's wrath and justice, but until we incline ourselves to these aspects of God's nature, we will never appreciate what has been wrought for us by grace. Even Edwards's sermon on sinners in God's hands was not designed to stress the flames of hell. The resounding accent falls not on the fiery pit but on the hands of the God who holds us and rescues us from it. The hands of God are gracious hands. They alone have the power to rescue us from certain destruction.” ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. - The Holiness of God*



***West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership***

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