



*Volume 11 Issue 1*

# *West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle*



*January 2024*

## *Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

### *Do Evangelicals Understand the Gospel?*

But what about the church today? Do evangelical Christians today have any clearer understanding of the gospel, of what it means to be saved? Sadly, again, there often seems to be little understanding even among those who are most active in evangelical circles.

Take for example a survey conducted by Christians United for Reformation (CURE) among the delegates to the annual convention of the Christian Booksellers Association some years ago. Since the delegates are comprised mostly of Christians, we would think that they would have a basic grasp of the essential truths of the gospel. But when CURE staff asked one hundred delegates at random, the staff found that only one of those who were polled gave an “adequate” definition of the gospel. Most of the answers were something like, “The gospel is having a personal relationship with Jesus,” or, “It means asking Jesus into your heart.” Absent from these definitions were any affirmations of the person and work of Christ and the appropriation of His work to the individual by faith alone.

The sampling in the poll was small—only one hundred from over five thousand. Perhaps the answers were skewed by how the question was asked. But after talking with the pollsters, I was left shocked by the apparent ignorance of the most elementary article of Christianity.

As it turned out, I was asked to preach at the Sunday morning worship service for the next Christian Booksellers Convention, a year later. With the results of the CURE survey still in mind, I decided to speak on the theme of salvation, asking the question, “What is salvation?” I was nervous about the selection of this topic. I had two fears. I feared that asking such a basic question of Christian publishers and booksellers would seem like carrying coals to Newcastle, that it would seem to them a waste of time to consider something they already knew fully. And I feared that by addressing such a basic matter I would be insulting the intelligence of my hearers and would come across as patronizing or downright rude.

When I finished the sermon that morning, I was overwhelmed by the response. All week long people came up to thank me, saying things like, “I never thought of it like that.” Indeed, I have attended every CBA convention since that year, and at every single one of them people have mentioned that sermon to me. If you are not a preacher, you might miss the significance of that. Rarely do people comment on sermons they heard from our lips in times past. I hardly remember myself what I preached on three weeks ago. My congregation would naturally remember even less. The power of the word is not in people’s being able to summarize a message they’ve heard. Rather, it is the power of God’s Word piercing the soul. With that in mind, let me reproduce here the full Bible text from my only sermon from the book of the prophet Zephaniah—the only time during almost forty years that I can remember preaching from Zephaniah, but a profoundly shocking text that uniquely answers the question, “Saved from what?” The text reads:



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle*



## *Do Evangelicals Understand the Gospel?*

*Continued from Page 1*

The great day of the LORD is near;  
It is near and hastens quickly.  
The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter;  
There the mighty men shall cry out.

That day is a day of wrath,  
A day of trouble and distress,  
A day of devastation and desolation,  
A day of darkness and gloominess,  
A day of clouds and thick darkness,  
A day of trumpet and alarm  
Against the fortified cities  
And against the high towers.

“I will bring distress upon men,  
And they shall walk like blind men,  
Because they have sinned against the LORD;  
Their blood shall be poured out like dust,  
And their flesh like refuse.”

Neither their silver nor their gold  
Shall be able to deliver them  
In the day of the LORD’s wrath;  
But the whole land shall be devoured  
By the fire of His jealousy,  
For He will make speedy riddance  
Of all those who dwell in the land (Zephaniah 1:14–18).

If we read this text carefully, we will easily see that it has precious little “gospel” in it. The message is not “good news” but horrific news. It is so dire that one is not surprised when it is relegated to a hidden corner of the pastor’s study. The message is not politically correct in our time. The descriptive terms Zephaniah uses to paint the picture of the day of the Lord include the following:

Bitter	Wrath
Trouble	Darkness
Alarm	Devoured
Distress	Gloominess
Blood	Fire
Devastation	
Refuse	
Desolation	



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle*



## *Do Evangelicals Understand the Gospel?*

*Continued from Page 2*

It seems almost as if the Holy Spirit enlarged Zephaniah's vocabulary to make the point clear. The litany of descriptive terms leaves little doubt about the horror of this predicted day. And this passage is but a small portion of the prophecy. The full message is even more hair-raising in its graphic declaration of the outpouring of God's wrath.

To be sure, the end of Zephaniah's book gives the divine promise of redemption. It ends on a high note, but not before stressing the dreadful exposure of the nation to the stark reality of divine judgment.

With a message so grim, what would even incline me to want to preach from this text? Simply this: here in this seldom preached passage we have the clearest descriptions in the Bible in answer to the question, "Saved from what?" And when we're talking about salvation, we are talking about the concept that is *the central theme of all of sacred Scripture*—a concept that it is imperative to understand. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. - Published from "Saved from What?"*

## *The Real Meaning of Christmas*

One of the most remarkable stories of Christmas comes from one of the darkest moments of modern history. World War I ravaged a continent, leaving destruction and debris in its wake. The human cost, well in the millions, staggers us. But from the midst of this dark conflict comes the story of the Christmas Truce of 1914. The Western Front, only a few months into the war, was a deplorable scene of devastation. Perhaps as if to give the combatants one day to breathe again, a truce was called from Christmas Eve through Christmas Day.

As darkness settled over the front like a blanket, the sound of exploding shells and the rat-tat-tat of gunfire faded. Faint carols, in French or English voices on one side and in German voices on the other, rose to fill the silence of the night.

By morning, soldiers, at first hesitantly, began filing out of the maze of trenches into the dreaded and parched soil of No Man's Land. There was more singing. Gifts of rations and cigarettes were exchanged. Family photos were passed around. Soccer balls appeared. Up and down the Western Front, soldiers, who only hours before had been locked in deathly combat, now faced off in soccer games.

For one brief but entirely remarkable day, there was peace on earth. Some have called the Christmas Truce of 1914 "the Miracle on the Western Front."

Anxious to print some good news, The Times of London reported on the events of the Christmas Truce. Soldiers recorded the day in letters home and in diaries. Some of those lines made it to newspapers, while others remained unknown until later brought to light. Here's one such line from the diary of a German infantryman: "The English brought a soccer ball from the trenches, and pretty soon a lively game ensued. How marvelously wonderful, yet how strange it was. The English officers felt the same way about it. Thus Christmas, the celebration of Love, managed to bring mortal enemies together as friends for a time."



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

## *West Suffolk Epistle*



### *The Real Meaning of Christmas*

*Continued from Page 3*

“Friends for a time,” “the celebration of love,” “peace on earth”—this is the meaning of Christmas. But these celebrations, these truces, don’t last. After Christmas Day, the soccer balls and the soldiers went back into the trenches. The Christmas carols subsided and the war carried on. And even though World War I eventually ended, a few decades later, Europe’s countryside and cities became the field of battle once again, as did Africa and the Pacific, during World War II.

Events like the Christmas Truce are worth celebrating. But they lack something. They lack permanence. Such impermanent peace is what we often find in our quest for the real meaning of Christmas. If we are looking for permanent and ultimate goodwill, love, and peace, we must look beyond our gift-giving, get-togethers, and office parties. We must look to no other place than to a manger.

We must look to a baby born not with fanfare, pomp, and circumstance, but to poor parents in desperate times. Joseph and Mary, and the Baby Jesus for that matter, were real historical figures. But in a way, Joseph and Mary extend beyond themselves, beyond their particular place and time. They represent all of us. We are all poor and living in desperate times. Some of us are better than others at camouflaging it. Nevertheless, we are all poor and desperate, so we all need the promise bound up in that baby.

We are in need of a way out of our poverty of soul and the desperate state of our human condition. We find it in this child lying in a manger, who was and is Jesus Christ, the long-promised Messiah, Seed, Redeemer, and King.

The birth of Jesus so many centuries ago might have been a slightly-out-of-the-ordinary birth. Even in ancient times, stalls didn’t typically double as birthing rooms and mangers didn’t typically double as cribs for new-born babies. And that newborn baby was very much out of the ordinary. Of course, in some respects, He was perfectly ordinary. He was a human being, a baby. He got hungry. He got thirsty. He got tired. When He was born, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes—the ancient equivalent of Pampers.

An infant; helpless, hungry, cold, and tired.

Yet, this child was the Son of God incarnate. He was Immanuel, which translated means “God with us.” According to the Apostle Paul’s account, this infant created all things. This infant created His own manger. And this infant, this King, brings peace on earth, ultimate and permanent peace. ~ ***Dr. Stephen J. Nichols - president of Reformation Bible College, chief academic officer for Ligonier Ministries, and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow.***



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle*



## *What Does “Xmas” Mean?*

The X in Christmas is used like the R in R.C. My given name at birth was Robert Charles, although before I was even taken home from the hospital my parents called me by my initials, R.C., and nobody seems to be too scandalized by that.

X can mean so many things. For example, when we want to denote an unknown quantity, we use the symbol X. It can refer to an obscene level of films, something that is X-rated. People seem to express chagrin about seeing Christ’s name dropped and replaced by this symbol for an unknown quantity X. Every year you see the signs and the bumper stickers saying, “Put Christ back into Christmas” as a response to this substitution of the letter X for the name of Christ.

### **There’s No X in Christmas**

First of all, you have to understand that it is not the letter X that is put into Christmas. We see the English letter X there, but actually what it involves is the first letter of the Greek name for Christ. Christos is the New Testament Greek for Christ. The first letter of the Greek word Christos is transliterated into our alphabet as an X. That X has come through church history to be a shorthand symbol for the name of Christ.

We don’t see people protesting the use of the Greek letter theta, which is an O with a line across the middle. We use that as a shorthand abbreviation for God because it is the first letter of the word Theos, the Greek word for God.

### **X Has a Long and Sacred History**

The idea of X as an abbreviation for the name of Christ came into use in our culture with no intent to show any disrespect for Jesus. The church has used the symbol of the fish historically because it is an acronym. Fish in Greek (ichthus) involved the use of the first letters for the Greek phrase “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.” So the early Christians would take the first letter of those words and put those letters together to spell the Greek word for fish. That’s how the symbol of the fish became the universal symbol of Christendom. There’s a long and sacred history of the use of X to symbolize the name of Christ, and from its origin, it has meant no disrespect. ~ *Dr. R,C, Sproul, Sr. - Previously Published in “Now that’s a Good Question”*



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle*



## *The Power to Persevere*

Eternal life means I have God's supernatural grace within me that enables me to live the Christian life. His power strengthens me to run the race in a way that glorifies Him.

Paul said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). God's power indwells us in the person of the Holy Spirit, whom we received at our conversion. Our problem is that we so often fail to tap into His power that is always there. We are like the man who was pushing his car up a hill only to discover he merely needed to turn the key and ignite the powerful engine. How much better it is to turn on the power and enjoy the ride. So it is in the Christian life.

Running is a demanding sport, draining every ounce of energy a person possesses. Running God's race saps all our power. We soon become depleted mentally, emotionally, and physically. That is the nature of running. It is full of uphill climbs, obstacles to overcome, winds to endure, and the scorching sun that leaves us feeling empty.

At times, we grow so weary that we want to pull over and stop running. But the race of life demands that we keep moving forward. We cannot stop. There are no yellow caution flags to stop this race, no pit stops. Just the daily grind.

To run life's race, we must have the power of God. In our weakness, God's power is perfected. The very divine power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is available to us for living the Christian life. This supernatural strength energizes us to run life's race. By His grace, we are raised to walk a new resurrection life in Christ.

We are like the man who went into a hardware store one Saturday morning to buy a saw. Seeing an easy mark, the salesman showed him a fancy chain saw. He commented that it was their best seller with the latest in technology, and guaranteed it to cut ten cords of firewood a day.

The inexperienced customer was impressed with the sales hype and bought the chain saw on the spot.

Later that day, this same man returned to the store, chain saw in hand, looking somewhat haggard, exhausted, and exasperated. "Something is wrong with this saw," he moaned. "I worked as hard as I could and only managed to cut three cords of wood. I could do four cords with my old-fashioned saw." Looking confused, the salesman said, "Here, let me try it on some wood we keep out back." They went to the woodpile, the salesman pulled the cord, and the motor roared to life."

The customer leaped back and exclaimed, "What is that noise?"

We can be much like this exasperated customer, attempting to live the Christian life in our own strength. But we have God's power within us, enabling us to do what is otherwise impossible. We have the power to resist temptation and love the unlovely. We have the power to rejoice in trials and overcome the world. We have the power to resist the devil and witness for Christ. We have the power to break old habits and live our new life in Christ. We have the power to run God's race. ~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson**



# West Suffolk Baptist Church

## West Suffolk Epistle



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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](mailto:gwlcf10415@gmail.com).

### ***Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner January 2024***

#### **Birthdays**

***Rick G. (1)  
Corissa A. (3)***

***March S. (9)  
Jack B. (24)***

***Muriel R. (24)  
Stephen H. (26)***

#### **Anniversaries**

***None to Report***

### ***Isaiah 9:1 - 7***

<sup>1</sup>But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. <sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. <sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. <sup>4</sup>For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. <sup>5</sup>For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup>For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. - **ESV**



### ***West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership***

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

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