



*Volume 11 Issue 8*

# *West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle*



*August 2024*

## *Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

### *The Religion of Secularism*

“In God we trust” officially became the national motto of the United States in 1956 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed it into law. Originally implemented in part to distinguish the United States from the Soviet Union and its explicit state atheism, the motto has remained to our day. Like many mottoes, however, the phrase has unfortunately become more of a throwaway statement for many Americans than a declaration of true faith in the one and only God of Scripture.

It is indeed our hope that our nation—and every nation—would genuinely trust God. Although many people claim to trust God, they act as if He has no authority whatsoever over their lives. They are an authority unto themselves, and the foundation for their self-appointed authority is as unstable as the emotions of their ever-changing hearts. Whether or not they know it, they have succumbed to secularism, which begins in the heart and ends in death. Secularism is the belief that man does not need God or God's laws in man's social, governmental, educational, or economic affairs. Ironically, secularism rejects religion, yet is itself a religion. In these United States of America, many of our politicians, courts, schools, and businesses embrace and promote the religion of secularism under the rubric of freedom from religion and by the advancement of human autonomy, which inevitably leads to anarchy.

It's bad enough that secularism is a growing problem in our culture, yet it's even worse that it's making inroads in the church. Worship is often shaped by the felt needs and wants of secularized people. Many pastors will not preach on hell for fear of scaring people away. Some of our most popular religious leaders do little more than take self-help messages and dress them up with a veneer of Christianity. Even some preachers have embraced secularism's teaching that we define our own reality. Thus, they are happy to redefine gender, marriage, and a host of other divinely revealed institutions and norms.

Secularism is not only a problem out there in the culture, it is something we must fight in our hearts, our homes, and our churches. We are too easily tempted to forget God and to avoid conflict with the world. It sometimes seems easier to live as if God really isn't there, to go about our days without reflecting on His authority and that we're called to live all of life *coram Deo*, before His face. But if we forget Him, we'll forget who we are. We are His people, and we are called to stand firm against the creeping darkness of secularism, declaring to our hearts, our homes, our churches, and our nation that the Lord God Almighty has authority over all and that, unwaveringly, in God we trust. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons - Senior pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., chief editorial officer for Ligonier Ministries, editor of Tabletalk magazine, and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow.**



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## *Wisdom made Foolish*

What do you think of when you see a cross?

You might think it makes for a nice piece of jewelry or a meaningful religious symbol. But that's not what it meant to people living in the first-century Roman Empire. Crucifixion was a disgusting and shameful way to die.

Last time, we saw that Paul's contemporaries associated crosses only with a humiliating death. But Paul constantly preached the cross of Christ.

If it weren't enough that crucifixion bore such a shameful stigma, there was also the shameful simplicity of the cross, a repudiation of worldly wisdom. First Corinthians 1:19–21 reads:

For it is written, *"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside."* Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

Both Jew and Gentile enjoyed complexity, especially the Greeks with their philosophical systems. They loved mental gymnastics and intellectual labyrinths. They believed the truth was knowable, but only to those with elevated minds. This system produced gnosticism, a belief that certain people, by virtue of their enhanced reasoning powers, could move beyond the *hoi polloi* (ordinary people) and ascend to the level of enlightenment.

In Paul's time, we can trace at least fifty different philosophies rattling around in the Greco-Roman world. And the gospel came along and said, *"None of them matter. We'll destroy them all. Take all the wisdom of the wise, get the best, get the elite, the most educated, the most capable, the smartest, the best at rhetoric, oratory, and logic; get all the wise, all the scribes, the legal experts, the great debaters, and they're all going to be designated fools."* The gospel says they are all foolish.

Paul's quotation of Isaiah 29:14 in verse 19, *"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,"* had to be an offensive statement to his audience. He was basically saying, *"I'll trash all you philosophers and all your philosophy."* Nothing was subtle about Paul, nothing vague or ambiguous. But the message wasn't Paul's, as he reminded us when he affirmed, "It is written"—literally, "It stands written." It stands as divinely revealed truth that the gospel of the cross makes no concession to human wisdom. Paul was just God's mouthpiece. Human intellect plays no role in redemption. And in verse 20, it's as if Paul was saying, *"What do you think you have to offer? What contribution does the legal expert, the scribe, make? What insight can the debater provide? They're all fools."*

First Corinthians 2:14 reads, *"But the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."* This is the problem. An unconverted person may have great reasoning power and intellect, but when it comes to spiritual reality and the life of God and eternity, he makes no contribution. Whether it's Athens or Rome, whether it's Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, Yale, or Princeton, or wherever else, all the collected wisdom outside of Scripture adds up to nothing but foolishness.



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## *Wisdom made Foolish*

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God wisely established that no one could ever come to know Him by human wisdom. The only way anyone will come to know God is by divine revelation and through the Holy Spirit. The final word on human wisdom is that it's all nonsense. Man, by human wisdom alone, cannot know God.

### **A Scandalous Message**

How, then, can man know God, if not by wisdom? *“Through the foolishness of the message preached.”* You want people to know God? Then just preach the message. Jeremiah 8:9 says, *“The wise men are put to shame, they are dismayed and caught; behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord, so what kind of wisdom do they have?”* If you reject the Scripture, you don't have any wisdom. If you change the message of Scripture, you can't preach wisdom.

We have no artistic license in delivering the gospel. Look again at 1 Corinthians 1:18: *“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* Then verse 21: God determined *“through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”* And verses 23–24: *“We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

Paul was giving one message alone: The power of God through the word of the cross is what saves people. Men are the tools for delivering that message, but the message doesn't come from them; it comes from God. And this is the only message we have.

Any other message is false and absolutely unacceptable, as Galatians 1:8–9 declares without apology or compromise: *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!”* But that is precisely what the popular Christianity Lite of today has done—it has substituted the gospel for another message that tries to eliminate the offense of the cross.

Almost no one tolerates the exclusivity and supremacy of Christ these days, even some who profess to be Christians. The message of the cross is not politically correct—it's the singularity of the gospel, on top of everything else, that bothers people. Can you imagine for a moment what might happen if a celebrity or political leader just said, *“I'm a Christian, and if you're not, you're going to hell”*?

And then imagine if he said, *“All the Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and all the people who believe they can earn salvation, whether liberal Protestants or Roman Catholics, and all the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses—you're all going to eternal hell. But I care about you so much, I want to give you the gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is far more important than wars in the Middle East, terrorism, or any domestic policy.”*

You can't be faithful and popular. So take your pick.



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## *Wisdom made Foolish*

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What Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians was that the gospel collides with our emotions; it collides with our minds; it collides with our relationships. It smashes into our sensibilities, our rational thinking, and our tolerances. It's hard to believe. And unfortunately, this is why people compromise; and when they do that, they become useless because God saves through this truth.

The cross in itself proclaims a verdict on fallen man. The cross says that God requires death for sin, while it proclaims to us the glory of substitution. It rescues the perishing—the damned, the doomed, the ruined, the destroyed; they are the lost, under the judgment of God for endless violations of His holy law. And if you don't embrace the Substitute, then you bear that death yourself, and it is a death that lasts forever.

The message of the cross is not about felt needs. It is not about Jesus loving you so much He wants to make you happy. It is about rescuing you from damnation, because that is the sentence that rests upon the head of every human being.

So the gospel is an offense every way you look at it. There's nothing about the cross that fits in comfortably with how man views himself. The gospel confronts man and exposes him for what he really is. It ignores the disappointment that he feels. It offers him no relief from the struggles of being human. Rather, it goes to the profound and eternal issue of the fact that he is damned and desperately needs to be rescued. Only death can accomplish rescue, but God, in His mercy, has provided a Substitute. No matter how unpopular this message is to the world, it should always be our joy to proclaim it. ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*

## *A Series of Unexpected Events*

In the midst of the fulfillment of the promise spoken through Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9) of the coming of the Messiah, many things have taken an unexpected turn in the eyes of the people. It should comfort us in these unexpected times we find ourselves in to see that our God works in unexpected ways to bring about unimaginable glories.

**First**, we see Jesus, who had been laying low (John 11:54), now orchestrating a well-planned, high-profile entrance into Jerusalem. The lamb is walking right through the front door of the viper's den. Many didn't think he should be going at all. Certainly, no one expected him to make a grand entrance. This is reckless!

**Second**, we see Jesus coming in an unusual way for the kind of king expected. It's no surprise that he would come riding in on a colt. Zechariah prophesied that the Lord's Anointed would do so. The timing, I think, is quite unexpected. The colt is not the animal of choice for riding into the battle. War-horses and chariots are better suited for that. The enemy had not yet been thrown down. The battle had yet to be fought. The colt is an animal for kings when the victory is already won, when peace is established. This is presumptuous!



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### *A Series of Unexpected Events*

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**Third**, the crowds that gathered that day were amazed and drawn to one who could raise life from the dead. Word had spread quickly about the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection. Many had witnessed it first hand. Many more had heard about it from others. Here was a man of power. If death could not resist him, how could the Roman legions? What they never expected was One who would bring life and victory through death. This is preposterous!

**Fourth**, Jesus permits the crowd's praises and proclamations. How many times have we seen Jesus quiet those who were healed, demons being cast out, crowds who were well-fed and ready to make him king by force? Now he allows it. Even more, it is he who has turned the hearts of the people to respond as they did. This is pretentious!

**Fifth**, the Jewish leaders were not expecting the overwhelming response of a crowd that had gathered from all the surrounding regions. This was no mere local phenomenon. This was not an isolated event that could be easily controlled and contained. As the Pharisees lamented, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him." This is disruptive!

As the watching world reacted to Jesus, so they will often react to His people as they faithfully serve Him. They will find us reckless in our obedience, presumptuous in our faith, preposterous in our convictions, pretentious in our claims, and disruptive in our living out peaceable lives of holiness.

Take heart in this and know that God is working His good purposes in the most unexpected of ways. ~ *Pastor Joseph Bailey - Church of the Redeemer - West Monroe, La.*

## *The Exodus of the Faithful: The United Methodist Church loses more than a million members—in a single day*

**July 5, 2024**

How do you lose a million members—in one single day? Last week, in just one vote, the United Methodist Church experienced a massive exodus as a group of African Methodists declared they could abide the UMC's theological liberalism and moral revolt no longer. Maybe you need to let that sink in for a moment. With that single vote, the Ivory Coast Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church just left the church, taking 1.2 million members and declaring that "the new United Methodist Church which distances itself from the Holy Scriptures is no longer suitable."

The unprecedented exodus of the faithful from the United Methodist Church is one of the biggest developments in recent church history. In the span of just two years, ending in December 2023, more than 7,000 American congregations left the church. Those congregations included some of the denomination's largest churches. In just one very important annual conference, nearly 80 percent of the congregations departed, shaking the dust off their feet as they left.



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## *The Exodus of the Faithful: The United Methodist Church loses more than a million members—in a single day*

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Those churches were finally fed up with the mainline denomination's refusal to stand by its clear doctrine and discipline on the issue of homosexuality. By the time the schism came, the issues covered the entire LGBTQ waterfront, including same-sex marriage, openly LGBTQ clergy, and a range of related issues. Just last month, what's left of the UMC met in North Carolina and surrendered to the theological revolutionaries. With the conservative congregations gone, the liberals were entirely in the driver's seat. Predictably, they drove the denomination off a cliff.

Of course, the theological disaster did not start with homosexuality. It began with theological liberalism and surrender to the spirit of the age. By the time the UMC met last month, speakers lined up to voice their "preferred personal pronouns" and assorted sexual and gender identities. It was like a drama based on Romans chapter 1. They just capitulated to the LGBTQ revolution and cloaked it all as a giant Pride event.

The UMC leadership had to know this was not going to go over well in Africa. At the meeting in May the assembly voted to allow some kind of autonomy on the part of annual conferences (districts of the church), outside the United States. Setting the stage for others to follow, the Methodists in the Ivory Coast decided to exercise the kind of autonomy that told the United Methodist Church to take a hike.

God bless them, they didn't mince words. The Ivory Coast Annual Conference declared that the United Methodist Church "is not based in any biblical and disciplinary values" and that it "is now based on socio-cultural and contextual values which have consumed its doctrinal and disciplinary integrity."

The new UMC "has preferred to sacrifice its honorability and integrity to honor the LGBT." And, since it "distances itself from the Holy Scriptures" it is to be repudiated and abandoned.

That is a courageous statement of theological outrage and an accurate depiction of what the United Methodist Church has become. The action was predictable and necessary and the African church stood up for the biblical truths the American church had abandoned. It has happened before.

A generation ago, the same pattern played out in the Anglican Communion. When the Episcopal Church in the United States elected an openly gay bishop and then went on to embrace the entire LGBTQ agenda, conservative national churches in Africa and the larger Global South responded with repudiation. During the most intense period of controversy, after the election of the gay bishop by the Episcopalians, I was seated at a dinner in New York City next to one of the Anglican Communion's famous African archbishops. We talked about the recent developments and the archbishop said to me, "We have our own temptations, but confusing marriage and endorsing homosexuality is not one of them."

In a jarring irony, one liberal UMC minister, Rev. Dorothy S. Boulware, celebrated the tidal wave of LGBTQ affirmation by writing a report with the headline: "United Methodists Embrace a Big Tent After Historic LGBTQ Inclusion Vote." Well, Reverend Dorothy, you are not going to need a big tent after all. For the sake of your "inclusive" theology you now include a few million fewer members. You just lost over a million in a single day.



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## *The Exodus of the Faithful: The United Methodist Church loses more than a million members—in a single day*

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The Methodists in the Ivory Coast serve as an example of what biblical faithfulness and gospel witness will require of us. To stay in a church that abandons Holy Scripture and surrenders to the spirit of the age is unfaithfulness. To stand for truth is often costly. Thank God, there are still Christians of courage and conviction in this world. May we all learn from them and, in our own churches, emulate their courage. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*

### *The Christian's Conflicting Desires*

His statement of longing for Christ to be glorified in him whether he lives or dies (Philippians 1:20) prompts Paul to “think out loud,” as it were, about the prospect of life and death in today’s passage. Specifically, the apostle considers whether it would be better to go on for many more years in this world or to pass at once into glory, illustrating the conflicting desires within the heart of every believer.

Considering the text as a whole, Philippians 1:21–24 indicates that there are distinct advantages for believers in both our lives and our deaths. On the one hand, living many years gives us almost countless opportunities to serve Jesus in this fallen world and bring great blessings to the brethren (v. 22a). In Paul’s specific case, this meant a reunion with the Philippian church and work that was “necessary” for their spiritual maturity (vv. 24–26). For the apostle to have been taken to heaven soon after writing this epistle would have been, from a limited earthly perspective, a disadvantage to the Philippians, who, from what Paul could see at the time, needed some face-to-face guidance.

On the other hand, physical death puts the Christian in a far better position, at least in the believer’s own experience. Simply put, to breathe our last is to enter the very presence of Christ Jesus (v. 23). The emphasis here is not so much on the cessation of earthly difficulties, although that is one of the blessings that attends face-to-face life before our Savior (Revelation 21). Instead, the focus is on the joys that come with experiencing the unmediated presence of the One who bought us with His own blood. We cannot even begin to describe the glories of that day.

Whether we live or we die, we do so in Christ, which is the main point of today’s passage (Philippians 1:21). Being in Jesus gives our entire existence meaning and purpose, just as it drove everything that Paul did on earth. Dying brings us great gain — the joys of communion with our Lord unhindered by sin. Living, however, is a great advantage as well, enabling us to bring glory to Christ among the nations. John Chrysostom writes, “One must not suppose that [Paul] is demeaning this life. . . . There can be profit even here, if we live not toward this life finally but toward that other” (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, NT vol. 8, p. 217).

One commentator has wondered what it would mean for the church if we really acted on the reality that “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” What if we more consistently conducted ourselves as if true life meant Christ and not a bigger house, a happy family, or a satisfying job, however important all these may be? What if we lived more regularly as if our deaths would result in the greatest gain we could ever conceive? ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



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***Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant***

If you have a birthday or anniversary in August 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 [gwlclf0415@gmail.com](mailto:gwlclf0415@gmail.com).

### ***Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner August 2024***

#### **Birthdays**

***Ben S. (8)***  
***Harper K. (11)***  
***Melody A. (12)***

***Carrie P. (24)***  
***Ezra P. (26)***  
***Marlin H. (27)***

#### **Anniversaries**

***Mike and Cheryl P. (9)***

### **Jesus, Founder and Perfecter of Our Faith** **Hebrews 12: 1-6**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

### **Do Not Grow Weary**

<sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” - *ESV*



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

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