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West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Honoring the Spirit by Honoring the Scriptures

From the very beginning, the battle between good and evil has been a battle for the truth. The serpent, in the Garden of Eden, began his temptation by questioning the truthfulness of God's previous instruction:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" . . . The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:1, 4-5)

Casting doubt on the straightforward revelation of God has been Satan's tactic ever since (John 8:44).

"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies".

With eternity at stake, it is no wonder that Scripture reserves its harshest words of condemnation for those who would put lies in the mouth of God, usurping His Word with dangerous experience that is paltry in comparison. The serpent was immediately cursed in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:14), and Satan told of his inevitable demise (v. 15). In Old Testament Israel, false prophecy was a capital offense (Deuteronomy 13:5, 10), a point vividly illustrated by Elijah's slaughter of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal following the showdown on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:19, 40).

But the Israelites often failed to expel false prophets; and by welcoming error into their midst, they also invited God's judgment (Jeremiah 5:29-31). Consider the Lord's attitude toward those who would exchange His true Word for a counterfeit:

Then the Lord said to me, "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who are prophesying in My name, although it was not I who sent them—yet they keep saying, 'There will be no sword or famine in this land'—by sword and famine those prophets shall meet their end! The people also to whom they are prophesying will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and there will be no one to bury them—neither them, nor their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters—for I will pour out their own wickedness on them." (Jeremiah 14:14-16; cf. Isaiah 30:9-13; Ezekiel 13:3-9)



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The point of those passages is unmistakable: God hates those who misrepresent His Word or speak lies in His name. The New Testament responds to false prophets with equal severity (cf. 1 Timothy 6:3–5; 2 Timothy 3:1–9; 1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7–11). God does not tolerate those who falsify or fake divine revelation. It is an offense He takes personally, and His retribution is swift and deadly. To sabotage biblical truth in any way—by adding to it, subtracting from it, or mixing it with error—is to invite divine wrath (Galatians 1:9; 2 John 9–11). Any distortion of the Word is an affront against the Trinity, and especially against the Spirit of God because of His intimate relationship to the Scriptures.

Martin Luther put it this way, *“Whenever you hear anyone boast that he has something by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and it has no basis in God’s Word, no matter what it may be, tell him that this is the work of the devil.”* And elsewhere, *“Whatever does not have its origin in the Scriptures is surely from the devil himself.”*

Although charismatics claim to represent the Holy Spirit, their movement has shown a persistent tendency to pit Him against the Scriptures—as if a commitment to biblical truth somehow might quench, grieve, or otherwise inhibit the Spirit’s ministry. But nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible is the Holy Spirit’s book! It is the instrument He uses to convict unbelievers of sin, righteousness, and judgment. It is the sword by which He energizes the proclamation of the gospel, piercing the hearts of the spiritually dead and raising them to spiritual life. It is the means by which He unleashes His sanctifying power in the lives of those who believe—growing them in grace through the pure milk of biblical instruction.

Thus, to reject the Scriptures is to rebuff the Spirit. To ignore, disdain, twist, or disobey the Word of God is to dishonor the One who inspired, illumines, and empowers it. But to wholeheartedly embrace and submit to biblical truth is to enjoy the fullness of the Spirit’s ministry—being filled by His sanctifying power, being led by Him in righteousness, and being equipped with His armor in the battle against sin and error.

Charles Spurgeon explained it this way to his congregation:

We have a more sure word of testimony, a rock of truth upon which we rest, for our infallible standard lies in, “It is written. . .” The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is our religion. . . . It is said that it is hard to understand, but it is not so to those who seek the guidance of the Spirit of God. A babe in grace taught by the Spirit of God may know the mind of the Lord concerning salvation, and find its way to heaven by the guidance of the Word alone. But be it profound or simple; that is not the question; it is the Word of God, and is pure, unerring truth. Here is infallibility, and nowhere else. . . . This grand, infallible book . . . is our sole court of appeal. . . . [It is] the sword of the Spirit in the spiritual conflicts which await. . . . The Holy Spirit is in the Word, and it is, therefore, living truth. O Christians, be ye sure of this, and because of it make you the word your chosen weapon of war.

The Bible is a living book because the living Spirit of God energizes and empowers it. The Word convicts us, instructs us, equips us, strengthens us, protects us, and enables us to grow. Or more accurately, the Holy Spirit does all of those things as He activates the truth of Scripture in our hearts.



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As believers, we honor the Spirit most when we honor the Scriptures—studying them diligently, applying them carefully, arming our minds with their precepts, and embracing their teaching with all of our hearts. The Spirit has given us the Word. He has opened our eyes to understand its vast riches. And He empowers its truth in our lives as He conforms us into the image our Savior.

It is difficult to imagine why anyone would ever disdain or neglect the words of this Book, especially in light of the divinely promised blessings that come from cherishing it. As the psalmist declared so long ago:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3)

(Adapted from Strange Fire) Dr. John MacArthur

The Final Judgment and the Christian Life

What happens to those who die while denying the truth of God in their lives? What will their rejection of the truth mean for them? Most people today do not want to think about the final judgment. For those who are young, death and eternity seem so far away. Yet if we would think seriously about eternity—heaven and hell—it would change the way we live today, and for many, it will change where they will spend eternity. Theologian and author R.C. Sproul noted, “*Modern man is betting his eternal destiny that there is no final judgment.*” This is a tragically fatal bet. The holiness and righteousness of God demand that He execute perfect justice on the final day. At the end of human history, God will judge the world, and His eternal purpose for redemptive history will, at last, be fulfilled.

Looming on the horizon of eternity, there is coming a terrifying final day of judgment. This world is spinning through space on a collision course with this final day of reckoning. Known as the great white throne judgment, this climactic hour of reckoning before God is described in numerous places throughout Scripture. The book of Romans identifies it as “*the day of wrath*” (Romans 2:5). Jude calls it “*the judgment of the great day*” (Jude 6). The Apostle Paul says that God “*has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness*” (Acts 17:31). This day is fast approaching—a final judgment day in which God will hold court, and all the world will stand trial before Him. In this final judgment, God will open the books and present His case. Every lost sinner will be judged, and God will announce His just verdict and condemn every unbeliever to hell.

This final courtroom scene is described with dramatic detail in Revelation 20:11–15. This is the highest court in heaven or on earth. It is the supreme court of the universe, and there is no higher court of appeal. Every lost sinner will be individually summoned to take his stand before the divine judgment bar, where every unbeliever will have his day in court before the Lord Jesus Christ. The evidence will be presented, and it will be an irrefutable case presented by God Himself.



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There will be no rebuttal offered, no defense rendered, and no sympathy extended. There will be no grace, no advocate to defend the sinner, and no miscarriage of justice. There will be no successful appeal by the guilty, and no parole from prison as an escape. There will only be perfect judgment.

What should this scene from the last day say to us, who are believers in Jesus Christ? What should this final judgment require of believers? There are two main points of application that we must put into action. Both are critically important as we live with a proper response to this truth.

We Must Be Humbled by This Truth

There but for the grace of God, we would suffer the same torment. There but for the grace of God, we would be judged and condemned. There but for the grace of God, we would be damned forever. The only difference between us and those who will be condemned at the great white throne judgment is the unconditional love and unmerited favor of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every one of us who believes in Jesus Christ deserves to be condemned at this great white throne judgment. We likewise should be cast down into the lake of fire, for we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Yet, God has taken our many sins and placed them behind His back. Jesus has removed our iniquities from us as far as the east is from the west. Christ has washed away our sins, imputed His perfect righteousness to us, and covered us with His blood, so that our sins will never be brought into account before God.

Let us, therefore, walk in lowly humility before our God. In light of this final day, there is no room for boasting by anyone. What lowliness of mind should grip each one who entrusts himself to Jesus Christ. We have no merit of our own but the merit of Him who lived in perfect obedience to the law and who died for those who have broken this law.

How humbly we should walk before our God. What thanksgiving we should offer to the Lord. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and nothing will ever separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:1, 39). How this should cause us to treasure our eternal salvation in Christ. Consider the great sin that has been forgiven you, and consider the great sacrifice that has been offered to take away your sin. Every one of us should walk lowly before our God in great humility.

We Must Bear Witness of This Truth

The retribution of truth in the final judgment should stir us to evangelism. There are people all around us who have yet to come to Christ, who are outside of the kingdom of God and thus under His wrath. The experience of God's redeeming love is restricted exclusively for those who are inside the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who are outside of Christ are in a fearful place. It is incumbent upon each and every one of us to go into the world and entreat the unconverted to come to the salvation that has already been prepared by Christ.



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What responsibility we have to go to our families, friends, classmates, and colleagues with a sense of urgency to share the love of God in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. How shall they escape if they neglect so great a salvation? How compulsory it is for us to go into all the world and to preach repentance before God and faith in Jesus Christ. How we must be used by God to reach others so that they may embrace the reality of truth in the word of the cross, rather than one day having to face the final retribution of truth in the final judgment. ~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson**

The Desperate Need for Reformed Ethics

I recently watched a short video of a lecture by my mentor and former pastor Dr. R.C. Sproul. In it, he explained that his ministry from the early 70s to the early 90s had been focused on addressing the catholic questions of Christianity—the doctrine of God, the doctrine of the person and work of Christ, the doctrine of Scripture, and such. During those first twenty years, he wanted to minister to broad evangelicalism, and these were the foundational doctrines under attack everywhere. But having addressed all those issues over the course of twenty years, Dr. Sproul says in his lecture that he wants to begin focusing on the distinctives of Reformed theology. He believed that the broad evangelical church could never be truly healthy until it was Reformed. He made the point that “Unreformed Christianity has failed.”

One of the things he said in this lecture especially caught my attention. He said that the broad evangelical church has been “pervasively antinomian.” I’ve been thinking about this comment a lot since watching the video, and I believe it makes a point that we need to seriously consider, namely, the fact that there is a radical difference between broadly evangelical ethics and distinctively Reformed ethics. There is a difference in the way each addresses ethical questions, and there is a difference in the sources used to answer those questions.

One of the doctrinal issues that separates broadly evangelical theology from confessional Reformed theology is covenant theology. The majority of evangelicals reject Reformed covenant theology, often because of its implications for our understanding of the sacraments. Among those evangelicals who are dispensationalists, the differences are even greater. Why is this significant? Because a rejection of Reformed covenant theology results in a very different hermeneutical approach to the Bible. The impact of those covenantal and hermeneutical differences is evident when it comes to how each handles the Old Testament in general and biblical law in particular. And how we approach biblical law is enormously important for our approach to Christian ethics. This is where Dr. Sproul’s charge of “pervasive antinomianism” arises.

Reformed theology historically has a way of approaching ethical questions. This approach includes careful examination of God’s law as revealed in Scripture. It includes examination of biblical wisdom literature. It includes consideration of natural law. It includes examining how other Reformed pastors and theologians of the past dealt with similar issues. In other words, it looks at Scripture as understood within our Reformed theological and confessional heritage. As an example, if an ethical question not explicitly addressed by Scripture arises, the Reformed would first go to the biblical law and wisdom literature to find applicable biblical principles. Natural law issues would be taken into consideration. Then we would look at how our confessions address this issue. The questions and answers on the Ten Commandments in the Westminster Larger Catechism, for example, are a rich resource on ethical questions.



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Those among the broadly evangelical world whose covenant theology effectively rules out the relevance of Old Testament law do not have these resources. When an ethical question not explicitly addressed in the New Testament arises, they are often forced to look elsewhere for ethical guidance. Sadly, many are looking to the culture for direction on ethical questions. A century ago, Christian liberalism did the same thing. It looked to culture for its categories, its definitions, its standards. Liberalism did this because it self-consciously rejected biblical authority. Antinomian evangelicalism is doing this inadvertently because its hermeneutical principles effectively render four-fifths of the Bible ethically irrelevant.

When we do this, we end up replacing *sola Scriptura* with *sola cultura*. Since our hermeneutical principles render most of the Bible ethically irrelevant, we don't turn first to Scripture. Instead, we go to the culture. We look at the lines the culture has drawn, the sides that the culture has created, the definitions that the culture has made, the agendas that the culture has endorsed, and then we hitch our wagon to one.

This is a big part of the reason unreformed Christianity has failed as Dr. Sproul said. This way of doing ethics is pervasively antinomian. It is most certainly not Reformed. As someone who is unapologetically Reformed observing the way ethical issues have been dealt with over the last several decades, I often feel like Treebeard. In the Lord of the Rings films, there is a scene in which Pippin, one of the hobbits, asks Treebeard, "*And whose side are you on?*" Treebeard responds "*Side? I am on nobody's side, because nobody is on my side.*" The confessional Reformed tradition doesn't let culture define the "*sides.*" Jesus Christ defines the sides and He does so through His commands in Scripture. ~ **Dr. Keith A. Mathison**

Adopting Christ's Attitude

"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:4-8) (ESV)

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 has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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) (ESV)

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). Ask God for an ever-increasing revelation of His glory. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in September 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 September 2024

Birthdays

Ben P. (3)
Zachary A. (9)
Rhydian H. (12)

Jonathan D. (15)
Ruth T. (23)

Anniversaries

None to Report

Thanksgiving and Prayer **Colossians 1:9 - 14**

⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ~ **ESV**



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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.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or its leadership.