



Volume 11 Issue 10

West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



October 2024

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

God's Freedom to Elect

Despite what we sometimes think, we have no say in what God does or how He does it. He's not swayed or influenced by our values, our interests, or our sense of justice. In fact, the psalmist tells us, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3).

Moreover, the Lord does not conform to our fallen, flawed standards. Everything He does is true and right because He does it. He would never do anything that's inconsistent with His own holy character. He Himself is therefore the standard of what is holy and righteous. In other words, He embodies all that is truly holy.

That's what we mean when we say God is holy. It is a principle that underlies everything Scripture teaches. It is certainly one of the fundamental precepts on which the doctrine of election is grounded.

Divine Freedom

Furthermore, the choosing of people for salvation cannot be isolated from every other thing God has chosen to do, because in the big picture God has ordained everything that comes to pass. Everything that God does He chooses to do, and His choices are free from any influence outside Himself. Therefore, the doctrine of election fits into this fuller comprehension of a sovereign God. That is election in its broadest sense, and it is evident on nearly every page of Scripture.

In the very act of creation, God created exactly what He wanted to create in exactly the way He wanted to create it, allowing for the very things that occurred in human history in order that He might accomplish the redemptive plan He had already designed. He chose a nation, Israel, not because they were better than any other people, or because they were more desirable than any other people, but simply because He chose them. Moses told Israel,

"The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you." (*Deuteronomy 7:6-8*)

Like all the elect, Israel was "predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will" (*Ephesians 1:11*).

In Psalm 105:43, He calls Israel "*His chosen ones.*" Psalm 135:4 says, "*the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself.*" In Deuteronomy 7 and again in Deuteronomy 14, we find these words: "*the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*" Scripture doesn't attempt to defend or explain the choice—it simply asserts that God did the choosing.



West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



God's Freedom to Elect *Continued from Page 1*

In the same way, God has sovereignly chosen from the very beginning everything that fits into His master plan of redemption. From its opening verses, the New Testament is replete with examples of God's sovereignty at work. He elected His Son as Redeemer, and appointed the time and means of His arrival on earth. It should be no surprise that He even chose the elect body who would be His Son's bride—the church.

His glorious plan for each individual Christian is likewise consistent with the way He has always operated—sovereignly. He has not handed His sovereignty over to something as vacillating and arbitrary as human free will. Christ told His disciples, *"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain"* (John 15:16). The apostle Paul says even the good works we do as believers were prepared by God *"beforehand"* (Ephesians 2:10).

Christians from the very outset have understood this. In Acts 13:48, Luke says, *"As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."* And, of course, the ninth chapter of Romans contains a monumental passage on the elective purposes of God as manifested in the choices of Jacob and Esau, and how God chose whom He chose—not on the basis of anything they had done, but according to His own sovereign, free, and uninfluenced purpose. *"Does not the potter have a right over the clay?"* (Romans 9:21). And *"who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?"* (v. 20). We're better off to keep silent than to question God's sovereign purposes.

Election and the Church

Throughout the New Testament there are references to the church as the elect—chosen by God. Ephesians 1 says we were chosen in Him, by His love, before the foundation of the world, that we might be brought to faith in Christ. In 1 Thessalonians Paul addresses the congregation as *"brethren beloved by God,"* and told them, *"[we know] His choice of you"* (1 Thessalonians 1:4). In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 we read, *"But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."* It doesn't get any clearer than that: God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, *"I will build My church; and the gates of hades will not overpower it."* This is a monumental statement: *"I will build My church."* *"I will build My church."* It's a statement of certainty, and of intimacy—"My church." It's also a statement of invincibility—God's church will stand against the gates of Hades, which is a Jewish euphemism for death. The implication here is important: If Hades is the abode of the dead, you get in by dying, so it's simply a reference to death, which is Satan's greatest weapon. Jesus was saying, I will build my church—and the worst that can be done to stop it, the death of My people, will not overpower it.

This is a very straightforward promise. The immutable, sovereign, faithful, gracious, omnipotent Lord of heaven—whose Word can never return void, but always accomplishes the purpose to which He sends it; whose plans always come to pass; whose will is ultimately fulfilled; whose plan is in the end invincible—He has spoken and said, *"I will build My church."* Nothing can prevent that.



West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



God's Freedom to Elect *Continued from Page 2*

That's the end result of God's work in election. If you are among the elect—those who have repented of their sin and trusted in Christ—then you can be certain that your election was not based on your faith or actions. If it was, grace would no longer be grace. God chose you of His own free will for His own divine purposes. This reality is the foundation of praise and worship because it is what Paul meant when he said that all things—including salvation—are “*from Him and through Him and to Him. . . . To Him be the glory forever. Amen*” (Romans 11:36). ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

Remembering the Reformation

Does the Protestant Reformation still matter? If so, why? These are important questions, especially in our day and age, because for many living today in the twenty-first century, what is important is not the past, but the future. We live at an unusual time in history. In terms of technology, the world has changed faster in the last one hundred years than it did in the previous two thousand years combined. This has affected us in many ways. Our generation no longer looks to the wisdom of the past for guidance; instead, we look for the next new invention. History is “yesterday's news.” What matters is tomorrow.

Sadly, the same way of thinking has influenced Christians. We look at church history with a jaundiced eye, finding it boring or irrelevant, but we must understand that this is an unwise approach. God has always called his people to remember his gracious works in the past. Israel was called to remember the exodus. Christians are called to remember the death of Christ. The same principle holds true with the lessons of church history. It has been rightly said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The church simply cannot afford to forget the lessons of the Reformation.

There are hundreds of books on the Reformation, but if one coming to the subject for the first time were looking for the best place to start, he would be hard pressed to find a better introduction than Stephen J. Nichols' *The Reformation* (Crossway, 2007). For those who find history difficult, Nichols' style of writing is a breath of fresh air. He does not fill page after page with dry lists of names and dates. Instead, his gift is the ability to draw readers into the lives of the people about whom he writes, allowing us to see these great historical figures, warts and all.

Nichols' book features eight short chapters, each containing numerous illustrations. As is the case in many Reformation histories, the chapter topics of Nichols' book are devoted to the various “branches” of the Reformation. Thus, there are chapters devoted to Luther and the reformation in Germany, Zwingli, the Radical Reformers, Calvin, and the English Reformation. However, unlike some books on the Reformation, Nichols also includes chapters on the Puritans, and on significant women of the Reformation.

In his chapter on Luther, Nichols offers a sketch of the important events that led up to Luther's break with Rome, but he does not lose sight of Luther the man in all of this. We must remember that the Reformers were not ivory-tower theologians, discussing doctrines in the peace and quiet of a modern academy setting. No, the Reformers did their theology in the trenches, and Luther is no exception. Nichols describes Luther's personal struggles in a way that helps readers understand more fully not only what Luther did, but why. He also describes Luther's sense of humor, and his deep love for his wife Katherina. In this way, Nichols helps us to understand that Luther was not a superhuman being. He was a man providentially placed by God in the midst of extraordinary circumstances.



West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



Remembering the Reformation

Continued from Page 3

The same style of writing is evident in the remaining chapters of the book. We find the Reformation initiated in Switzerland during a sausage supper in Zurich with a notable young priest named Zwingli present. We discover the origins of the Anabaptists, those Christians whose convictions concerning baptism and the separation of the church and state often resulted in their martyrdom. We encounter the young John Calvin, whose overnight stop in Geneva on his way to Strasbourg ultimately changed his life and the course of church history. We see the Reformation gain a foothold in England as a result of a king's desire for a male heir. In all of this, we are introduced to a fascinating and diverse cast of characters, from the soul-searching Martin Luther to the soul-selling Johann Tetzel, from the non-compromising John Knox to the pragmatic Thomas Cranmer.

In his chapter on the Puritans, appropriately titled "*Men in Black*," Nichols clears away centuries of misrepresentation. He describes the roots of puritanism in the ups and downs of the reformation in England, agreeing with one scholar that puritanism was the "real English Reformation." In his concluding chapter, Nichols introduces us to some of the unsung women of the Reformation, the wives of the Reformers as well as women who made significant contributions to the Reformation on their own.

The church must not forget the lessons learned during the Reformation. We cannot forget what happens when the gospel is obscured and distorted. The Reformation does still matter. Read Stephen Nichols' book and discover why. ~ **Dr. Keith A. Mathison**

Who is Satan?

In Scripture, the term Satan means "adversary." We know him as the devil. He is a high angelic creature who, before the creation of the human race, rebelled against God and has since battled with human beings and God. He is called the prince of darkness, the father of lies, the accuser, and the beguiling serpent. The real portrait is nothing like the horned, trident-bearing, comedic adversary to which we have become accustomed. That image, at least in part, arose out of the medieval church. The silly picture of Satan was intentionally created by the church in order to poke fun at him. The church was convinced that an effective ploy to withstand Satan was to insult him. His most vulnerable part was seen as his pride. To attack his pride was seen as an effective way to repel him.

The biblical view of Satan is far more sophisticated. He appears as an "angel of light." That image points to Satan's clever ability to manifest himself under the appearance of good. Satan is subtle, beguiling, and crafty. He speaks with eloquence; his appearance is stunning. The prince of darkness wears a cloak of light. Scripture also speaks of Satan as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Christ is also referred to as a lion, the Lion of Judah. He is a redeemer, the anti-lion and devourer. Both images speak of strength.



West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



Who is Satan?

Continued from Page 4

How, then, should the believer react to Satan? On the one hand Satan is indeed fearsome. In 1 Peter 5:8 we are told that “*your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*” The believer is not to respond, however, in sheer terror. Satan may be stronger than we are, but Christ is stronger than Satan. The Bible declares, “*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*” (1 John 4:4). Satan is, after all, a creature. He is finite and limited. He is limited in space and time. He cannot be in more than one place at a time. He is never to be regarded in any way as an equal with God. Satan is a higher order of being than humans; he is a fallen angel. But he is not divine. He has more power than earthly creatures but infinitely less power than almighty God. ~ *Ligonier Editorial*

What does it Mean to Forgive?

Matthew 18:15–20 gives us the pattern we should follow when someone has sinned against us, but what does it mean to forgive in the first place? For an answer, let us look to God the Father, the One who has perfectly modeled forgiveness for us. When God forgives us, He no longer holds our sins against us. He no longer condemns us. Our fellowship with Him is no longer disrupted. This is because Jesus Christ has suffered sin’s full penalty for all those who trust in Him.

We forgive others because God has forgiven us. Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, “*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*” (Matthew 6:12). Like God, to forgive someone means to no longer hold sin against the person who has sinned against you. When we forgive someone, we are once again in a positive relationship with them.

Forgiving someone, however, does not mean that the offender experiences no consequences for his or her actions. When grievous harm is done, consequences ensue. We see this in our relationship with God. If, for example, we were to steal something, the Lord will forgive us if we repent. But that does not mean we will not have to suffer criminal punishment or pay back the person from whom we stole. God forgave David for his sin with Bathsheba, but that sin had severe consequences that followed him the rest of his life in the form of family turmoil (see 2 Samuel). We can and must forgive those who have sinned against us, but when criminal behavior is involved in the sin, it should be reported to the civil authorities, whom God gave to protect us from evildoers (Romans 13:1–7).

Someone who comes to you and asks for forgiveness is showing a sign of repentance. We should never withhold forgiveness from someone who asks for it from us (Matthew 18:21, 22; Luke 17:3). If we do not forgive someone who asks, we do not display the richness of God’s mercy to us in Jesus Christ (Matthew 18:23–35).

Sin is a sad reality of life in a fallen world, and it has major consequences. Jesus Christ willingly gave His life for our sins. Our forgiveness came at an unimaginable price. The beauty of the Christian life is that we can forgive others in a way that God has forgiven us. ~ *Ligonier Editorial*



West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



Two Kinds of Land

We have considered the warning passage in Hebrews 6:4–6 which says, “⁴*For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,* ⁵*and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,* ⁶*and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*” However the text does not teach us that those with true faith in Christ can commit final apostasy. That is, it is impossible for those who have savingly trusted in Jesus to abandon their profession of faith and then never come back. God’s true children, of course, can fall far and hard. Much like the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32, they can reject the Father for a time. But like the son in the parable, they will also finally come back to the family—and our Father will receive them with open arms. Thus, all those who have been saved will persevere to the end, and only those who persevere to the end were ever saved to begin with (see Matt. 24:13; 1 John 2:18–19).

Hebrews 6:7–8 offers some confirmation for this position in its contrast between two different kinds of vegetation, or in reality, two different kinds of land. “⁷*For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.* ⁸*But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*” The author distinguishes between land that produces a useful crop and land that “*bears thorns and thistles.*” Note that in both cases, the land receives the same rain, which in context must refer to the blessings of the Lord. Yet only one kind of land actually bears true and lasting spiritual fruit. It is not that one bears good fruit and then stops doing so, producing useless thorns and thistles instead; rather, one produces true and lasting fruit from the beginning, but the other does not. One is good soil that has received good seed and is able to sustain healthy food. The other is poor soil where only bad seed can grow.

As we know, land cannot make itself good or poor. Instead it must be worked by an outside force—typically a gardener or farmer—to make it able to grow food. It must be tilled, fertilized, irrigated, and so forth, or it cannot do anything useful. Similarly, the hearts of men and women, boys and girls cannot make themselves good. Apart from grace, our hearts are poor soil for the seed of the gospel. God must change our hearts, giving us the gift of faith in our regeneration so that we will believe and bear fruit for His glory (John 3:1–8).

Other passages of Scripture tell us that people cannot come to faith apart from divine election and that all those who do exercise saving faith and are justified will be glorified; they will never finally fall away (Romans 8:29–30). Hebrews 6 does not deny this. Salvation from start to finish is the work of God alone. He brings people to true faith, sustains them in true faith, and gives them eternal life.

Coram Deo

Only God can make the soil of our hearts fit to receive the word of the gospel so that it will take root. We need the Lord to do this not only at conversion but continually throughout our Christian lives as we come to Him over and over again in faith and repentance. Ask the Lord this day to give you a soft heart that will receive His Word and respond with faith and repentance to His grace. ~ *Reformed Bible Studies & Devotionals at Ligonier.org*



West Suffolk Baptist Church

West Suffolk Epistle



Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

If you have a birthday or anniversary in October 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 October 2024

Birthdays

Ezekiel F. (1)
Charlene S. (3)
Hazel Kay T. (10)

Anniversaries

Andy and Emily L. (10)

Life in the Spirit Romans 8:1 - 11

8 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **2** For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. **3** For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **4** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **5** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. **6** For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. **7** For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. **8** Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. **9** You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. **10** But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. **11** If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

~ESV



West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.

Office: 1001 Kenyon Court, Suffolk, VA 23435

E-Mail: pastorscofield@gmail.com

Website: <https://www.graceforsuffolk.org>

Phone/Fax: 757-539-0363

Teaching Pastor/Elder: Pastor Ben Scofield (Front Center)

Teaching Elders: Scott Thomas (L) and Mike Prince (R)

Deacons: Marlin Halsey, John McPhatter and John Hurst (L to R)

Editor: Walt Lawrence, gwlcf10415@gmail.com/757-619-3268

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.