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West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Life Under the Sun October 14, 2024

As protests and riots raged across the country and around the globe, many Christians have pondered how God's people should respond. In many ways, this discussion dominates the church today, but not all of the proposed solutions line up biblically.

Unbiblical Strategies

Some have offered specific strategies to show compassion and make a difference while the culture collapses around us. For example, many in the church have suggested that God's people need to take an active role in changing the laws of the land, and putting new people into positions of power. I won't deny that it is a tremendous blessing to have a voice in our political process, and that God's people are responsible to support biblical standards of morality in society. But at the same time, we must recognize that there is no way to legislate true righteousness, and no human leader can hold back the tide of man's corruption.

The Bible is clear about the state of the unrepentant soul. *"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). Paul reminds his readers of how they lived prior to Christ: *"For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another"* (Titus 3:3). Elsewhere he says, *"The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so"* (Romans 8:7).

We can change the laws or add new ones, but sinners fundamentally cannot keep the law—changing policies can't change the heart of man. The same is true when it comes to our leaders and elected officials. We can swap different sinners into positions of power, but we shouldn't expect drastically different results. God's people can't put their hope in human leaders—as we've already seen, *"There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one"* (Romans 3:10–12).

Other believers have suggested partnering with a social-justice movement like Black Lives Matter. And while everyone should agree that black lives do matter because they are made in the image of God, the movement itself is much more than that simple slogan. In their own documents, they eagerly affirm homosexuality and transgenderism. They argue for the dissolution of the family. They're Marxist, atheistic, and anti-authority.

Put simply, there's no partnership between a radical movement like that and the people of God that doesn't defy the clear commandment of 2 Corinthians 6:14, *"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?"* Paul goes on to illustrate the futility and foolishness of believers forging unions with the very corruption from which God has saved them. Quoting from Isaiah, he says, *"'Come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord"* (v. 17).



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Still others will argue that, even if a specific partnership like that isn't an option, believers still ought to join the protests. That Christians need to speak out against injustice.

But remember what Paul explained in Romans 13—that we are to be subject to the governing authorities, because God Himself established them. Peter gives us similar instructions. *“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right”* (1 Peter 2:13–14). Why? *“For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men”* (v. 15). How we respond to authority—whether just or unjust—has repercussions for our testimony. Our submission can actually silence those who oppose the gospel and are looking for reasons to criticize believers.

He continues on the theme of submission in verse 20, *“For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.”* Peter wants us to submit and suffer for the sake of righteousness—rather than suffering the consequences of our sin. But notice that he treats suffering—one way or the other—as inevitable. In fact, he says, *“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps”* (v. 21). Just as Christ submitted to unjust suffering and abuse, we should likewise expect to suffer. Peter even says, *“Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing”* (1 Peter 4:12–13).

Suffering is the greatest tool in the life of the believer. It's how the quality of our faith is tested and proven. It's how we learn to rely on God's strength instead of our own. It's how the Lord displays His sufficiency and provision to the watching world. God has great purposes in our suffering. And as Peter reminds us, it's temporary. *“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you”* (1 Peter 5:10). God is not unaware of or unmoved by our suffering—on the contrary, He's working through it to sanctify us and grow us in the likeness of His Son.

Having said that, Scripture is not blind to the injustices of this world. The book of Ecclesiastes gives us a wise and helpful perspective on the nature of this world and the place of God's people in it. Regarding the prevalence of injustice, Solomon writes, *“If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them”* (Ecclesiastes 5:8). It's presumed that human beings can't be trusted. The whole reason for structured hierarchies is to make people accountable and mitigate the inequity and oppression that will inevitably occur.

We understand that life in this world will not be fair. *“I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all”* (Ecclesiastes 9:11). We can't guarantee equitable outcomes for everyone. But we know there is no advantage for those who do evil. *“Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God”* (8:12–13).



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The wicked may benefit in the short term, but they cannot avoid death and judgment. *“Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness. I said to myself, ‘God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man,’ for a time for every matter and for every deed is there”* (3:16–17).

God’s people don’t turn a blind eye to injustice or the chaos of unchecked sin. But neither do we take its punishment into our own hands. *“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord”* (Romans 12:17–19). God is the Judge—we should not attempt to do His work for Him.

We need to console ourselves with the fact that we won’t always know what God is accomplishing through suffering and trials. We have no choice but to trust in His sovereign timing. As Solomon reminds us, *“He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11). So how, then, do we live amidst the chaos and corruption of sin?

Solomon continues, *“I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God”* (vv. 12–13). We need to recognize this life for the gift it is. Again, *“I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?”* (v. 22). We don’t know what’s ahead for this world—how much worse it might get before the Lord returns. But in the short time we have, we don’t need to be part of the disruption and rebellion. Our lives *“are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away”* (James 4:14). We should be happy and enjoy the gift we’ve been given.

That’s not to say we should live self-involved lives in the constant pursuit of pleasure. Rather, it means that we take full advantage of the blessings God has bestowed on us. God wants us to make the most of the life He has given us.

Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.
(Ecclesiastes 9:7–10)

In this fallen, corrupt, chaotic world, if you have any wisdom at all, take everything God has given you. Enjoy your work. Enjoy your marriage. Enjoy the fellowship of the church and the work of the gospel. Enjoy your life, and be happy.



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It is not our calling to fix this world. God will deal with the corruption and chaos of sin in His own timing. In the words of Solomon, *“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14). ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

Holiness in an Age of Worldliness

The temptation to do whatever it takes to be prosperous is very strong. It is a kind of magic spell that beautiful Babylon puts over us. It’s like a potion that dulls our spiritual senses so we cannot fathom living any other way. Babylonian worldliness leads people to trust in their prosperity. It perpetuates the myth of security.

You would think that one thing every Christian would agree on is the need for personal and corporate holiness. After all, the Bible tells us repeatedly, *“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy”* (Leviticus 19:2; 20:7; 1 Peter 1:16). As God’s people, we must strive for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

And yet, many Christians seem scarcely interested in holiness and little concerned by Scripture’s warnings for those who do not pursue holiness. It is easy to get Christians passionate about family matters, or cultural issues, or political concerns. But some Christians have actually argued that part of “knowing what time it is” in our cultural moment is recognizing that virtues like obedience, truth-telling and purity of speech are unnecessary obstacles to defeating our political enemies. More commonly, churches or pastors that lean hard into the Bible’s exhortation to holiness are likely to be called pietistic, legalistic and unloving.

We should not be surprised at these protestations. The world, the flesh and the devil have always hated holiness. How could they not? God is holy, and the unholy trinity (the world, the flesh and the devil) hates God. To be holy is to be like God, which means that a necessary step toward God is to flee the world.

In Revelation 18:1-4, John hears a voice from Heaven calling Christians to come out of Babylon. Here, Babylon does not refer to one literal/historical kingdom. Babylon is a composite picture of many kingdoms—Rome, Tyre, Sodom, Nineveh and Jerusalem. Babylon is manifest today in the corruption, idolatry and immorality in America, in Canada, in the United Kingdom and in every other country.

Babylon is the anti-church. She is the opposite of Christ’s pure, spotless bride. Babylon is corrupt society, fallen culture, decadent civilization. In a word, Babylon is worldliness. Wherever sin looks attractive, impressive and pervasive—and it seems that you cannot live without it—there is Babylon.

So how do we flee Babylon? It doesn’t mean we must leave our urban centers. There is often “Babylon” in the country as much as there is in the city. We come out of Babylon by not taking part in her sins (verse 4). Revelation 17 and 18 are a warning against spiritual adultery and compromise.



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That's why Babylon is depicted as a great prostitute. She looks attractive on the outside, but she holds in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and impurities (Revelation 17:4). The spirit of Babylon pulses through our veins when we do whatever it takes to get along in Babylon and get rich in Babylon.

What might adultery with Babylon look like today?

- Making financial profit more important than the people you serve and the principles you claim to believe in.
- Neglecting your responsibility to tithe to your local church and give generously to missionaries, worthwhile Christian organizations and those in need.
- Going into so much debt that you are no longer free to serve the Lord as He might call you or give generously as He might lead you.
- Choosing not to have any children because you think they are too expensive or don't fit with your dreams and ambitions. (I say this acknowledging many would-be parents struggle through the pain of infertility.)
- Making ethical compromises as a doctor, pharmacist, lawyer, entrepreneur, advertiser or government employee for fear that you might lose business or your job.
- Affirming the signs and symbols of the sexual revolution so your friends won't think negatively of you.
- Making decisions about your future based solely on what kind of income you can make and not on more important factors like ministry opportunities and proximity to a strong church.
- Sacrificing time needed for spiritual disciplines, family discipleship and personal ministry in order to make more money and make your possessions look more impressive.

The temptation to do whatever it takes to be prosperous is very strong. It is a kind of magic spell that beautiful Babylon puts over us. It's like a potion that dulls our spiritual senses so we cannot fathom living any other way.

Babylonian worldliness leads people to trust in their prosperity. It perpetuates the myth of security. It wants us to forget that for all her might, Babylon the great will fall in a single hour (Revelation 18:10). If we don't want to weep on the day of judgment, then we need to make sure we are not putting our hope in Babylon now.

One of the dangers for Christians in our day—where politics is everything and everything is political—is that we fail to cultivate a vertical gaze and a transcendent hope. We can end up spending our best time and energy on restoring America or saving Western Civilization.

To be sure, there is an appropriate way to be concerned about these things, to even be involved in these things. In my church, for example, we started a monthly prayer time for our country in advance of the upcoming election. But for as much as we care about our earthly home, we'd better have Hebrews 13:14 impressed deep in our souls: *"Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come."*

If you want a place with singing, celebration, joy and feasting, then live for the place where you get all those things forever. Christ welcomes you to that eternal home. He goes ahead of you to prepare a place for His disciples. He will take you by the hand and lead you into the promised land.

But you have to leave Babylon to get there. "Come out of her, my people," says the Lord, "lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues" (Revelation 18:4). ~ **Kevin DeYoung - Senior Pastor at Christ Covenant Church (PCA) in Matthews, North Carolina**



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Faithful Interpretation

One of the most important yet often most neglected fields of study in the church is hermeneutics, or the study of the interpretation of literary texts. As Christians, we are focused especially on the proper interpretation of sacred Scripture, for the lack of a sound, consistently applied hermeneutic results in poor interpretations and applications of Scripture. Many people in the church today base their hermeneutics on their feelings or impressions. As an example of this, small-group Bible studies often ask, “What does this verse mean to you?” rather than the more appropriate question, “What does the author of this verse mean?”

Hermeneutics must be based on established principles, not pragmatics or emotions. To that end, the pastors who drafted the Westminster Standards provided the church with the most concise and helpful summary of Scripture and its interpretation ever formulated. Chapter 1 of the Westminster Confession of Faith is perhaps the most important. It establishes that Scripture is our only infallible rule for faith and practice and provides us with hermeneutical principles rooted in Scripture. In so doing, it gives us the principles that faithful interpreters of Scripture have sought to apply from the very beginning of church history.

Westminster Confession 1.6 states: “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.” This means that we interpret and apply Scripture based on the words of the text as well as on the inescapable principles and necessary applications of the text. This is one of the most important hermeneutical principles for Christian life and doctrine, and it is precisely how we see Jesus Christ and the biblical authors approaching Scripture. Therefore, the confession also states, “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself, and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly” (1.9). Scripture interprets Scripture using what is explicitly written and what may be properly deduced from Scripture. But we must not neglect the significance of the crucial words “good and necessary.” Otherwise, we will fall into legalism, putting our traditions on the same level as the Word of God. A tradition not based on a good and necessary deduction cannot bind the conscience, but good and necessary deductions are vital for defining and defending the faith once delivered to the saints. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons - Editor of *Tabletalk* magazine and Senior Pastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla.**

Our Only Infallible Rule

At the time of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, one of the key points of dispute between the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church was related to the doctrine of Scripture. To be more specific, the Reformers taught the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, or Scripture alone. The use of the word *sola* indicates that they were affirming that there is something unique about Scripture. But what is it that is true only of Scripture? As the Westminster Larger Catechism explains, “The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience” (Q&A 3).

Notice the word “only.” The Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and obedience. Why? Because the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God. That is the fundamental point of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*—namely, that Scripture has the authority of God whose Word it is, and God’s authority is infinitely higher than any human authority because God is God and humans are not. In other words, the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* ultimately rests on the distinction between the Creator and His creatures.



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There is a metaphysical difference between the Word of God and the words of any human beings. Yet as seemingly obvious as this point is, there remain many misunderstandings of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* and its implications.

There are, for example, those who believe that Scripture's ultimate divine authority rules out the existence of any subordinate human authorities. In such a view, not only is Scripture the ultimate and final authority, but it is the only authority at all. There remains no place for ecclesiastical authority or creedal authority. *Sola Scriptura*, according to those who hold this view, is diametrically opposed to any positive use of traditional teaching or practice. It is important to understand that this concept of *sola Scriptura* is not the doctrine taught by the early Reformers. It is a serious distortion of that doctrine, influenced more by post-Enlightenment philosophies than by the theology of the Reformation.

For the Reformers, the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* meant that Scripture is the final authoritative norm for faith and life and that Scripture is to be interpreted in and by the church. The Reformers did not deny that the church and its creeds have any real authority. They denied that the church and its creeds have the same kind of authority that God has. The Reformers distinguished God's ultimate divine authority from subordinate human authorities.

So far were the Reformers from rejecting creeds and confessions that they were actually churning them out by the dozens. In the first 150 years after the beginning of the Reformation, Reformed churches and theologians wrote well over a hundred confessions and catechisms, and these confessions of faith and catechisms taught the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. In other words, the early Reformed theologians saw absolutely no conflict between the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* and the ecclesiastical use of confessions of faith.

To understand why they saw no conflict, it is necessary to recognize what a creed or a confession is and how such writings differ from the writings that we find in the Bible. The writings that we find in the Bible are unique because they are the very Word of almighty God. In 2 Timothy 3:16, we read that "*all Scripture is breathed out by God.*" Other translations read, "All Scripture is inspired." This is where we get the technical theological term inspiration. The doctrine of inspiration is a translation of the Greek word *theopneustos*, which literally means "God-breathed." It is an assertion that the words of Scripture are not merely human words. Yes, they are the words of men such as Moses and Paul, but ultimately, these words are God's words. They are God-breathed. Their ultimate source is the mouth of God. Therefore, the words of Scripture carry the very authority of God.

Creeds and confessions, on the other hand, are not *theopneustos*. They are not God-breathed. They are man-breathed. They are human statements of faith. The word creed comes from the Latin *credo*, which simply means "I believe." *Credimus* means "We believe." Everybody has a creed, whether they call it a creed or not. Even those who say, "I believe in no creed but Christ" or "I believe in no creed but the Bible" have a creed. Their words "I believe" indicate the existence of their creed. These creeds are short creeds, and they are self-contradictory creeds, but they are creeds nonetheless. In other words, creeds are unavoidable by anyone who believes something to be true. The only real question is whether our creeds are good creeds or bad creeds.



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Creeds are subordinate to and dependent on Scripture. If there is no Scripture, there is no creed. In a creed, the church is corporately stating what it believes that God's inspired Word teaches. It is a faithful response to the divinely authoritative teaching of Holy Scripture. Scripture is God saying, "Thus saith the Lord." A creed is the people of God saying, "We believe You, Lord." The Scriptures, for example, say with divine authority, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). In response, the church confesses, "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth" (Nicene Creed).

The church's creedal response of faith does not give Scripture its authority. God's Word has God's infinite divine authority regardless of whether anyone believes it. Nor does the church's creedal response of faith add to the infinite divine authority of Scripture. The church's creedal response instead recognizes and publicly acknowledges Scripture's divine authority. The sheep hear their Shepherd's voice (John 10:27), and they respond accordingly. The church confesses its belief in the doctrines coming from the very mouth of God in Holy Scripture. The church's confession is authoritative, therefore, in a subordinate way. It is authoritative to the extent that it expresses God's Word accurately. ~ **Dr. Keith A. Mathison - Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla.**

Adopting Christ's Attitude

"Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on the cross!" (Philippians 2:4–8, NIV).

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 exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, 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, NIV).

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). ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in November 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 November 2024

Birthdays

Brenda A. (1)
Conley L. (1)
LeAnn M. (10)
Audrey D. (11)

Luke P. (15)
Walt L. (20)
Nicole P. (28)

Anniversaries

Gene and Brenda A. (22)
Marlin and Sadie H. (22)

Godlessness in the Last Days

2 Timothy 3:1–9

3 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. 6 For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, 7 always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. ~ ***ESV***



West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership

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