



West Suffolk Epistle



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West Suffolk Baptist Church

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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Reject False Worship

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who worship God acceptably, and those who do not. And the fact is, apart from faith in Christ—apart from God’s saving work in a sinner’s life—acceptable worship is impossible.

Because worship is inextricably linked to salvation, it shouldn’t be a surprise that the topic comes up in Christ’s conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:16-18).

The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” (John 4:19-20)

We’ve already discussed the origins of the Samaritan people—that they were the offspring of Jews who had intermarried with pagan Gentiles after the Assyrian invasion. One of the results of that intermarrying was the corruption of their faith. They kept the Pentateuch but adopted other pagan idols and rituals along with it, merging the sacrificial systems and creating a false, hybrid religion. They even built an alternate temple and altar on Mount Gerizim, not far from where Christ was talking with the woman.

Her question then is a simple one: She wants to know which religious system is correct. She’s already acknowledged that Christ must be a prophet to know what He knows about her life. The guilt she spent so much time trying to avoid has now come down in full force on her head. Jesus has unmasked her as a sinner, and she wants to be right with God. And she knows that assuaging her guilt requires worship.

So she falls back on the only thing she knows: external religion. The fact is, all unrepentant sinners see worship as external. They cannot understand or appreciate the internal transformation that takes place in salvation, so they’re left grasping at impotent ceremonies and rituals to absolve the guilt of their sins.

She wants to know which system of works holds the key to her absolution. Is it the Samaritan faith, a Judeo-pagan hybrid? Or is it the Jewish system, based solely on the Law and the Prophets? Which temple should she visit to reconcile with God? Where does she need to go and what does she need to do to find forgiveness and peace?

Christ’s answer is monumental, giving us the most definitive teaching on the theology of worship in all the gospels. And it starts with a denunciation of external forms of worship.

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:21-24)



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The Lord makes it clear that it's not the place where she worships that matters. What she's looking for is not dependent on a ceremony or ritual. Instead, true worship is about loving, honoring, obeying, and serving God from the heart.

Jesus' answer is a critique of the Samaritan faith, apostate Judaism, and any system of works-based salvation and righteousness. God was never interested in rituals and sacrifices alone—what always mattered most was the heart behind those acts of worship. That's why He condemned the hypocrisy of Israel's religion (Amos 5:21-23; Malachi 1:6-14). Divorced from true faith in God, Israel's sacrificial system was a useless pantomime.

In His death, Christ abolished the sacrificial system once and for all. When He died, God miraculously shredded the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple, signifying the end of the Old Testament system and ratifying the New Covenant. There are no more temples, no more altars, and no more sacrifices. In Christ, every place is a sanctuary and every believer a priest. We no longer require mediation—we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us.

In this simple conversation, Christ ushers in a new era of worship—one that isn't bound to externals and symbols. True worship comes from the love of God and the knowledge of Scripture, and it can happen anywhere and everywhere.

That's a vital point when it comes to sharing the gospel with nonbelievers. Salvation isn't about praying a special prayer, walking an aisle, or any other ritual. It's about bowing to the Lord in repentance and faith, submitting to His Word, and worshipping Him in spirit and truth. Anything short of that is empty religion. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur - Pastor-Teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, as well as an author, conference speaker, chancellor of The Master's University and Seminary**

What Is Patristics?

Have you ever heard someone refer to "the church fathers" or "patristics" and wondered what those words mean? If so, you are not alone. I began my Christian life in a theological setting where those words were rarely, if ever, used. When I later found myself in Reformed churches and began to hear those words more often, I was initially unsure of their meaning.

Typically, when an author or speaker refers to "the church fathers," he or she is referring to non-inspired, orthodox Christian authors from the first four or five centuries of the church after the completion of the New Testament. In other words, a distinction is made between the inspired writings of the New Testament, which were completed in the first century, and other Christian writings. The authors of these other Christian writings are referred to as "the church fathers." The study of their works is referred to as "patristics" or "patrology." These technical terms come from Latin word *pater*, which means "father."



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The earliest of these writings have come to be known as “the Apostolic Fathers.” That designation can be confusing because these authors were not Christ’s Apostles. Instead, the Apostolic fathers are those authors writing in the generation immediately following the writing of the last of the New Testament books. In other words, the Apostolic Fathers are Christian writings dating from approximately AD 70–150.

The next major dividing line in the history of the early church is the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. This council was called to deal with the Arian heresy. The church fathers who wrote prior to the Council of Nicaea are referred to as the ante-Nicene fathers. The prefix ante- means “before.” It differs from the prefix anti-, which means “against.” The ante-Nicene fathers, thus, wrote *before *the Council of Nicaea. The post-Nicene fathers wrote *after *the Council of Nicaea.

The writings of the early church fathers are a fascinating source of information about the early church, but they must be read with discernment. As the leaders of the early church began to work through the teaching of Scripture, it often took much time before all the good and necessary consequences of Scripture were worked out. Sometimes a heresy would arise that would force these church fathers to be more specific and nuanced than earlier Christian writers had been.

It is also necessary to read these works with discernment because Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox apologists will often use them to trip up evangelical Christians. These apologists will frequently encourage a Protestant to go read the writings of the second, third, and fourth centuries and then argue that only their church is doctrinally consistent with what is found in them.

It is important to remember that although historians make a necessary distinction between the inspired writings of the New Testament authors and the non-inspired writings of the early church fathers, there is a very real sense in which the authors of the New Testament books are the earliest “church fathers.” The church is built on the foundation of the prophets and Apostles (Ephesians 2:19–21). Their writings, not the writings of later post-Apostolic authors, are the standard of our faith and practice. If a Roman Catholic apologist encourages you to read the early church fathers and stops at the beginning of the second century, remind him or her that the earliest church fathers are the authors of the New Testament. He or she stopped one century short.

The reason Roman Catholic apologists stop at the beginning of the second century is because there are some important differences between the content of those writings and the content of the first-century New Testament books. It is important to remember that in the earliest decades following the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the church was predominantly comprised of converted Jews. All the Apostles were Jews. The thousands of converts on the day of Pentecost were Jews. Gentiles began to be gradually grafted in through the missionary work of Paul and others, but the early church was shaped by its Jewish Old Testament background. If you leap forward, however, to the middle of the second century, about one hundred years after the events in the book of Acts, you’ll notice that the church was now predominantly comprised of gentiles, converted pagans.



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What accounts for this radical shift over such a short period of time? One of the most important factors, if not the most important factor, was the series of wars between the Romans and the Jews between AD 66–135. At the beginning of the first war (AD 66–73), the Jews were strongly established in the land of Israel and in various places around the Mediterranean Sea. By the end of the *Bar Kochba* revolt (AD 132–136), the Jews had been thoroughly defeated and dispersed.

How might a shift from a predominantly Jewish church to a predominantly gentile church have affected the content of the writings produced before and after the shift? For one thing, first-century Jewish Christians were fundamentally shaped by the Old Testament. Their understanding of the relationship between God and man was shaped to its core by the biblical concept of the covenant. Pagan gentile converts often did not have the Old Testament as a formative influence. Their thought world was shaped by other concepts, such as those found in Greek philosophy. This may explain to some extent why soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) in the early church sometimes looked more like the Greek idea of the soul's "ascent to the One" than it did to the biblical concept of salvation.

All of this means that while the church fathers are important for understanding the early development of Christian doctrine, their writings are to be measured against Scripture. They cannot be treated as the inspired and infallible standard of faith and life. When and where they incorporate elements of Greek thinking, those elements must be carefully evaluated against the standard of Scripture to make sure they are consistent. Inconsistent elements of thought must be rejected. ~ *Dr. Keith A. Mathison - Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla.*

New Year's Resolutions for God's Glory, Not Our Own

It seems that every December, many people make well-intentioned resolutions for the new year. With premeditated bursts of enthusiasm, they are caught up in a whirlwind of peculiar, and sometimes public, activities that puzzle even neighborhood children. We witness surprising promises and new year's manifestos whereupon we are summoned to behold what sweeping changes may come in the new year.

The skeptical observer may ask: Is all this new year's fervor genuine? Is it helpful? Is it really necessary? Moreover, the curious onlooker may ask: Is it even appropriate to make resolutions? After all, shouldn't we at all times and all seasons seek to live wisely, obediently, and biblically?

Some may even go so far as to argue that resolutions themselves are not biblical, based on the fact that the Word of God itself provides us with a complete and authoritative compilation of God's resolutions for His people to obey. To manufacture our own list of resolutions, they would argue, is superfluous at best. These are the sorts of questions I have always considered when it comes to the whole business of making resolutions, and I have a hunch that many of my biblically informed brethren also ponder such questions. Yet, we know that it is right and biblically justifiable to resolve to establish certain priorities and principles in life so that we might serve others faithfully and glorify God in all we think, say, and do.



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And although it has not been my habit to make new year's resolutions, I have always sought to establish and keep certain priorities and principles by which I strive to live every day, praying that the Lord would come to my aid daily to help me live according to those priorities and principles for His glory, and His glory alone, and not for the accolades and applause of those around me.

As such, in considering how to glorify God in all that we do in our particular circumstances and callings, it is appropriate for us to establish and keep certain priorities and principles as we strive to love and follow Christ as His disciples—to the end that we might obey all that He has commanded us. For some, resolutions may be one way they go about doing this, whether they make these resolutions at the turn of the new year or throughout the year. All the while, whether or not we make resolutions, we do well to remember that we can only keep our priorities and principles in life by the power of the Holy Spirit, resting assured that by faith, and by faith alone, we have been declared righteous by the Father because of the righteousness of the Son.

The nineteen-year-old Jonathan Edwards knew his weaknesses and was aware of the destructive nature of his sin, so he resolved to establish certain priorities and principles in his life in his effort to live entirely for the glory of God. He helped pave the way for us as he prefaced his seventy resolutions with these words:

Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat Him by His grace to enable me to keep these resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to His will, for Christ's sake.

These simple introductory words of Edwards not only provide us with a glimpse into the mind of one of history's greatest thinkers, but they also provide us with a glorious insight into the heart of a young man who had been humbled and mastered by the Lord God Almighty. We would therefore do well to consider Edwards' prefatory remarks as we seek to glorify God and enjoy Him forever in our churches, our homes, and our hearts.

Resolving Sensibly

“Being sensible,” Edwards begins his preface—we must be sensible, reasonable, in making resolutions. If we hastily make resolutions out of an illusion of sinless perfection, it is likely that we will not merely fail in our attempt to keep such resolutions but that we will likely be less inclined to make any further resolutions for similar desired ends. We must go about making resolutions with genuine prayer and out of a thorough study of God's Word. Our resolutions must be in accord with the Word of God; therefore, any resolution we make must necessarily allow us to fulfill all our particular callings in life. We must consider all the implications of our resolutions and be careful to make resolutions with others in mind, even if it means implementing new resolutions incrementally over time.



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Resolving Dependently

“I am unable to do anything without God’s help,” Edwards admits. We must be honest in grasping the simple truth that every resolution must be made in dependence on God. And while every Christian would respond by saying, “Well, of course we must depend on God for all things,” most Christians have been sold the world’s bill of goods. They think that once they become dependent on God, they will have immediate strength. They repeat the world’s mantra: “Whatever doesn’t kill me will make me stronger.” While the principle is generally true, such thinking can foster an attitude of proud independence. We must understand that being able to do all things through Christ who strengthens us means that we must depend on His strength continuously in order to do all things and to keep all our resolutions (Ephesians 3:16; Philippians 4:13; Colossians 1:11). In truth, whatever doesn’t kill us makes us weak, by God’s conforming grace, so that in our weakness we will rely continuously on the strength of our Lord (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).

Resolving Humbly

“I do humbly entreat him by His grace to enable me to keep these resolutions.” In making resolutions for the glory of God and before the face of God, we must not come into His presence pounding our chests in triumphal arrogance as if God must now love and bless us more because we have made certain resolutions to follow Him more. In reality, the Lord in His providence may choose to allow even more trials to enter our lives; in His unchanging fatherly love for us, He may decide to discipline us even more in order that we might more detest our sin and delight in Him. We should approach Him in humble reliance on His grace as we seek not merely the blessings but the One who blesses.

Resolving for Christ’s Sake

“So far as they are agreeable to His will for Christ’s sake.” We cannot resolve to do anything with a presumptuous attitude before God. The whole matter of making resolutions is not just goal setting so that we might have happier lives. We are called by God to live according to His will, not our own—for Christ’s sake, not our own—for it is not to us but to Him that all glory belongs (Psalm 115:1). ~ *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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West Suffolk Baptist Church Collapse in the Cathedral

Collapse in the cathedral: A scandal in the Church of England reveals big lessons for all Christians.

Headlines around the world last week told of the resignation of the Most Reverend Justin Welby, the titular leader of Anglican Christians around the world, as archbishop of Canterbury. Just days after insisting he would not resign, Welby's office announced that he would step down in the wake of an investigation into the sexual and physical abuse of boys and young men at Christian camps. The specific charge against Welby is that he did not inform authorities when advised of the abuse.

The man at the center of the abuse allegations, John Smyth, is now dead and will never face a human court of justice. The report commissioned by the Church of England was released by Keith Makin, who led an independent review. The report reveals that church authorities, including the archbishop of Canterbury, should have reported the abuse to law enforcement authorities, who could well have prosecuted Smyth.

Welby's position became untenable when political leaders such as Prime Minister Keir Starmer and at least one church bishop called for his resignation. The decisive signal apparently came from King Charles III. The British monarch is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, which is an official state church. Evidently, that still matters.

Welby's resignation sets in motion a process for choosing his successor. The matter goes to a crown commission, which advises the prime minister and, eventually, King Charles. The process is likely to take several months, though the pressure to put a new archbishop in place will be enormous.

The entire matter, horrible as it is in moral terms, also requires us to take stock of what remains of the Church of England and what lessons are to be learned.

The Church of England resulted from the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. At the same time, the emergence of an English church independent of the papacy came with a combination of seismic theological, political, and cultural changes—many of them revolving around King Henry VIII and his six wives. The Church of England emerged with something of a two-party system that included both ardent advocates of the Reformation and those who wished to retain as much Catholic worship and practice as possible. By the time you get to the 19th century, the church had a three-party system of evangelicals on the right, liberals on the left, and Anglo-Catholics growing in influence. The Church of England prided itself on having forged a “middle way” between classic Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. And, as so often happens with middle ways, the project became amorphous. The church went so far as to claim “comprehensiveness” in doctrine—a claim often asserted but never really defined. When liberalism is an option, liberalism eventually wins.

Back in the 19th century, novelist Anthony Trollope famously described the Church of England as “the only church that interferes neither with your politics nor your religion.”



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When Justin Welby became the 105th archbishop of Canterbury, some described him as an evangelical of sorts. He had entered the ministry of the Church of England after a career in upper management of an oil company. He had an interest in charismatic groups such as the Vineyard Movement led by John Wimber. He was presented as a stabilizing establishment choice to lead a church in radical decline.

But Archbishop Welby became a parable of theological equivocation and evasion at the very time his church desperately needed clarity, conviction, and clear direction. When serving as a parish priest, he affirmed the Bible's clear teachings on homosexuality, sexual expression, and marriage. Back in 1999, Welby stated, "Throughout the Bible, it is clear that the right place for sex is only within a committed, heterosexual marriage." As recently as 2003, Welby had affirmed the same position, arguing that "sexual practice is for marriage, and marriage is between men and women and that's the Biblical position."

But Welby caved. Indeed he crashed. Asked in a media interview if gay sex is sinful, he responded, "I haven't got a good answer." It was an astounding admission. It was a display of flat-out ministerial failure. It was either a lie (since he had been able to answer the question quite clearly in the past) or it was an indication that he had switched sides in the controversy (which he didn't appear to possess the courage to admit) or an admission of sheer abdication of responsibility (which it obviously was).

Fast-forward to just weeks ago and the archbishop went back on the same broadcast with the same interviewer and, predictably, was asked the same question again. This time, Welby chose Option 2 and simply advised that he affirms "that all sexual activity should be within a committed relationship." He then added, "Whether it's straight or gay." What a disgrace.

The Church of England is in a free fall in terms of attendance and public influence. Anglican churches around the world, including in many African nations, are rejecting Canterbury's authority. Welby presided over state funerals and the coronation of King Charles III, but he deserves to be best remembered as the archbishop of Canterbury who just surrendered to the modern age, LGBTQ activists, and the sexual revolution. Biblical authority and Christian clarity on sex, marriage, and gender—all thrown overboard by the archbishop himself.

In actuality, Justin Welby will be remembered as the archbishop of Canterbury who, at the very least, did not prevent a cover-up of sexual abuse. That, too, serves as a stark warning. The whole thing, as my grandmother would say, just stinks to high heaven. You bet it does. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. - President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in February 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 February 2025

Birthdays

Tina K. (13) *Jacob David K. (24)*
Rita B. (14) *Brodie L. (27)*
Andy L. (14)

Anniversaries

Jonathan and April F. (5)
Daniel and Diana K. (11)
Mike and Rose M. (17)

The Seven Angels with Seven Plagues - Revelation 15:1 - 4

15 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished. ² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³ And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are your deeds, O Lord God Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”~ **ESV**



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

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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 it’s leadership.