



West Suffolk Epistle



Volume 12 Issue 3

West Suffolk Baptist Church

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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

The Lord's Positive Prodding

The constant war between our new nature in Christ and our old, sinful flesh is a recipe for spiritual inconsistency. Regardless of how long you've been saved or how much you've grown spiritually in that time, temptation to sin is always waiting around the corner (1 Peter 5:8).

And because we too often fall back into our old, sinful patterns, the Lord uses a variety of means to prod us back to repentance and a right relationship with Him—some are positive, others are negative. For today, let's consider some of the key methods God uses to positively prod us to repent.

First, He uses our knowledge. God has given His Word so that His people might repent. Through the Bible, He tells us that we ought to turn from a self-righteous attitude toward total faith in God through Jesus Christ plus nothing else. Scripture contains everything we need for salvation and sanctification (2 Timothy 3:16-17), including practical wisdom for identifying and destroying sin in our lives. We can't act on God's Word unless we know it first.

Access to and an understanding of Scripture is essential for true repentance. Apart from His Word, we can't know the truth about our sin, our need for a Savior, Christ's perfect sacrifice on our behalf, the means of salvation, or God's pattern for sanctification. Cut yourself off from the truth of God's Word and you've cut yourself off from any hope of repentance, redemption, or spiritual growth.

The Lord's **second** means for prodding believers to repentance is His goodness. As Jesus said, "*He . . . sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous*" (Matthew 5:45). God showers His goodness on people through the joys of life, such as love and the beauty of nature. In Romans 2, the apostle Paul says that the Israelites had every blessing and promise of God, and yet they treaded on His goodness. He says, "*Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?*" (Romans 2:4). God's goodness is for the purpose of bringing us to turn around and change our minds about Him and about Jesus.

Third, God uses our sorrow for sin as a means to prod us back to repentance. Have you ever done something wrong and then felt bad? That's a good thing, because guilt is God's way of enabling us to feel the evil of our own sin.

As the soul's internal warning system, the conscience can cause depression and anguish over your sin. But it's a precious gift that God has given each person to guard him from the dangers of sin, and to steer him back to His perfect, righteous standard.

Therefore, how you respond to your conscience is vitally important. There are a lot of people who are sorry about their sins but who are not saved because they do not turn from sin. Others believe but they can't get past their guilt feelings, and their perpetually wounded consciences inhibit their spiritual growth. It is critical that our sorrow over sin prompts us to repentance and change (2 Corinthians 7:9). Otherwise it's worthless. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



West Suffolk Epistle



West Suffolk Baptist Church

What is the Prayer of Faith?

Years ago, the editor of a publishing company asked me to write a book on prayer. The theme is a vitally important one. The publishing house was well known. To be honest, I felt flattered. But in a moment of heaven-sent honesty, I told him that the author of such a book would need to be an older and more seasoned author (not to mention, alas, more prayerful) than I was. I mentioned one name and then another. My reaction seemed to encourage him to a moment of honesty, as well. He smiled. He had already asked the well-seasoned Christian leaders whose names I had just mentioned! They, too, had declined in similar terms. Wise men, I thought. Who can write or speak at any length easily on the mystery of prayer?

Yet in the past century and a half, much has been written and said particularly about “the prayer of faith.” The focus has been on mountain-moving prayer by which we simply “claim” things from God with confidence that we will receive them because we believe that He will give them. But what exactly is the prayer of faith?

Association with the Dramatic

Interestingly, it is in the letter of James (who has so much to say about works) that the term occurs. It climaxes the marvelous teaching on prayer that punctuates the entire letter (James 1:5–8; 4:2–3; 5:13–18).

What is even more striking is that the significance of the phrase seems to be illustrated by the experience of one individual, the prophet Elijah. In his case, the prayer of faith was instrumental in shutting the heavens. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that the phrase has come to be associated largely, if not exclusively, with dramatic, miracle-like events—with the extraordinary rather than the daily.

Yet this misses the basic thrust of James’s teaching. The reason Elijah is used as an example is not that he was an extraordinary man; James stresses that he was “a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17). It is his ordinariness that is in view.

Elijah’s praying is used as an example not because it produced miracle-like effects but because it gives us one of the clearest of all illustrations of what it means for anyone to pray with faith: it is believing God’s revealed Word, taking hold of His covenant commitment to it, and asking Him to keep it.

The Prayer of a Righteous Person

Shutting up the heavens was not, after all, a novel idea that originated in the fertile mind of Elijah. In fact, it was the fulfillment of the promised curse of the covenant Lord: “*If you do not obey the Lord your God . . . these curses will come upon you. . . . The Lord will strike you . . . with scorching heat and drought. . . . The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder*” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 22–24, NIV).



West Suffolk Epistle



West Suffolk Baptist Church

What is the Prayer of Faith?

Continued from Page 2

Like every “righteous man” (James 5:16), Elijah sought to align his life with God’s covenant promises and threats (which is, essentially, what “righteousness” means in the Old Testament—to be rightly covenantally related to the Lord). He lived his life in the light of the covenant God had made, and so he held on to its threats of judgment in prayer, as well as to its promises of blessing.

This, then, is the prayer of faith: to ask God to accomplish what He has promised in His Word. That promise is the only ground for our confidence in asking. Such confidence is not “worked up” from within our emotional life; rather, it is given and supported by what God has said in Scripture.

Truly “righteous” men and women of faith know the value of their heavenly Father’s promises. They go to Him, as children do to a loving human father. They know that if they can say to an earthly father, “But, father, you promised . . .,” they can both persist in asking and be confident that he will keep his word. How much more our heavenly Father, who has given His Son for our salvation! We have no other grounds of confidence that He hears our prayers. We need none.

Legitimate Prayer

Such appeal to God’s promises constitutes what John Calvin, following Tertullian, calls “legitimate prayer.”

Some Christians find this disappointing. It seems to remove the mystique from the prayer of faith. Are we not tying down our faith to ask only for what God already has promised? But such disappointment reveals a spiritual malaise: would we rather devise our own spirituality (preferably spectacular) than God’s (frequently modest)?

The struggles we sometimes experience in prayer, then, are often part of the process by which God gradually brings us to ask for only what He has promised to give. The struggle is not our wrestling to bring Him to give us what we desire, but our wrestling with His Word until we are illuminated and subdued by it, saying, “*Not my will, but Your will be done.*” Then, as Calvin again says, we learn “*not to ask for more than God allows.*”

This is why true prayer can never be divorced from real holiness. The prayer of faith can be made only by the “righteous” man whose life is being more and more aligned with the covenant grace and purposes of God. In the realm of prayer, too (since it is a microcosm of the whole of the Christian life), faith (prayer to the covenant Lord) without works (obedience to the covenant Lord) is dead. ~ **Dr. Sinclair Ferguson - Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow, vice-chairman of Ligonier Ministries, and Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary.**



West Suffolk Epistle



West Suffolk Baptist Church

What Does Perspicuity Mean?

One of the most important but often most overlooked parts of our order of service at Saint Andrew's Chapel is the prayer of illumination. In our liturgy, the prayer of illumination is situated between the reading of Scripture and the sermon. In our prayer, we humbly ask God to illumine His Word to us by the Holy Spirit so that we would rightly hear, understand, and apply what the Lord is saying to us in His Word. The reason it is one of the most important elements of our service is because we desperately need the Holy Spirit to help us understand His Word. The reason it is perhaps the most overlooked part of our service is because we too easily forget how dependent we are on the Holy Spirit to help us grasp the glorious truths of God's sacred Word.

The Holy Spirit indwells us and enables us to interpret and apply His Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth. We are utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Without Him, we cannot rightly understand anything in His Word. We don't need to be great scholars to understand God's Word, we simply need to be born-again, humble children indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Yet, even as believers, we know that not everything in Scripture is easy to understand.

In theology, we speak of the perspicuity of Scripture. The word perspicuity, simply put, means "clarity." Oddly enough, the word perspicuity is one of the more unclear words we could use to speak of clarity. What's more, when we say we believe in the perspicuity of Scripture, people sometimes get the wrong impression that we are implying that everything in Scripture is entirely clear and easy to understand. But that's not the case. We know this both from experience and because the Word of God itself tells us that not everything in it is easy to understand. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1.7) explains what we believe when we speak of the perspicuity of Scripture:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all. Yet, those things that are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or another, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

In other words, not everything in Scripture is easy to understand, but what we must understand in order to be saved is clear. The hard sayings of Jesus aren't found only in the Gospels, but throughout Scripture, since Jesus is the ultimate author of Scripture as the eternal Word of God.

Fundamentally, what is so hard about the hard sayings of Jesus is not our inability to understand them fully but to believe them fully and obey them fully. That is why we need the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit to help us not only understand God's Word but to obey it, love it, apply it, and proclaim it as we live *coram Deo*, before the face of God for His glory. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons**



West Suffolk Epistle



West Suffolk Baptist Church

5 Things You Should Know about Creeds

Most Christians have heard of things like the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed, but many Christians also have a number of misconceptions about creeds. There is a lot of misunderstanding about the nature, history, and purpose of creeds. Here are five things you should know about creeds.

1. The word "creed" comes from the Latin word *credo*, which simply means "I believe."

The plural form is *credimus*, which means "we believe." In short, when we recite a creed, we are simply making a statement concerning what we believe. What this means is that if you believe anything, you have a creed. What if you say, "I believe in no creed but Christ"? Well, then, that's your creed. It's a short creed, but it is a creed. When we understand that creeds are human statements of faith, it also helps us better understand the relationship between Scripture and creeds. Holy Scripture is inspired. The Greek word in 2 Timothy 3:16 is *theopneustos*, which literally means "God-breathed." Scripture is the inspired Word of God. Creeds are non-inspired words of men. In the Scriptures, we hear God saying, "Thus saith the Lord . . ." In the creeds, we respond, "We believe you . . ."

2. The Bible itself uses creed-like summaries.

Probably the most well-known example of this is the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4, which begins "*Hear, O Israel: The lord our God, the lord is one.*" This short creed-like statement is expanded upon by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:6 to take account of the further revelation concerning Jesus Christ. Other creed-like statements in the New Testament are found in Romans 10:9–10 ("Jesus is Lord") and 1 Corinthians 15:3–4.

3. The Apostles did not write the Apostles' Creed.

The legend that the twelve Apostles wrote the Apostles' Creed appears to have originated in the fourth or fifth century, but there is no evidence that the legend is true. There is evidence in the second and third centuries of the existence of short creedal statements in the churches. One of the most well-known is the Old Roman Creed. Its content, and the content of the others, is very similar to the content of the later Apostles' Creed. The content of all these early creedal statements derives from even earlier baptismal liturgies in which the baptized was asked a series of questions to which he or she gave short formulaic responses. The content of these short liturgical statements of faith is the same as the content of the early creedal statements. Some early Christian writers, such as Irenaeus, referred to this content as the *regula fidei* or "rule of faith." It was a summary of the biblical teaching concerning God.

4. The Nicene Creed was written in order to defend the biblical teaching concerning God against heretics.

Any reader of Scripture will notice that it teaches several things quite clearly.

First, it teaches that there is one and only one true God. **Second**, it teaches that the Father is God. **Third**, it teaches that the Son is God. **Fourth**, it teaches that the Holy Spirit is God. **Finally**, it teaches that the Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son.



West Suffolk Epistle



West Suffolk Baptist Church

5 Things You Should Know about Creeds

Continued from Page 5

As both Christians and non-Christians asked how all five of these teachings fit together, occasionally an answer would be proposed that solved the difficulties by rejecting one or more of these biblical doctrines. In the fourth century, a man named Arius “solved” the problem by denying that the Son is God. This created a controversy that lasted for decades. The controversy was dealt with at the Councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381). The result of these councils is what we know as the Nicene Creed. It is a statement of the church’s belief about the biblical doctrine of God written to defend that belief against the anti-Christian doctrine of Arius and others. It follows the basic outline of the earlier and shorter credal statements, but it adds specific language to rule out heretical distortions of that content.

5. The use of creeds is not a slippery slope to Roman Catholicism.

As mentioned above, all Christians have a creed whether they realize it or not. All you have to do to prove this is to ask any Christian (including yourself), “What do you believe the Bible teaches about (pick a topic)?” Whatever the response is, it is a creed. The early Protestants did not reject the ancient creeds of the church. They continued to teach and defend the biblical doctrine of the Trinity as summarized in the Nicene Creed. They continued to teach and defend the biblical doctrine of Christ as summarized in the Definition of Chalcedon. It was only heretics like the Socinians (the liberals of the sixteenth century) who rejected the ancient Christian creeds. ~ **Dr. Keith A. Mathison - Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla.**

The History of Study Bibles

In 1560, an exiled group of pastors and theologians made history. They published the first full edition of the Geneva Bible. It was a remarkable feat on many fronts.

These scholars who worked on the Geneva Bible had been leaders of the Reformation in England and Scotland. When “Bloody Mary” took the throne, she threw into reverse the advancing Reformation, taking the nation back to Roman Catholicism. Britain’s Reformers found themselves in prison, martyred, or in exile. Many went to Calvin’s Geneva.

Calvin wasn’t much for idle hands. Florentine jewelers who had converted to Protestantism were also among the exiles who came to Geneva. Most of their prior work revolved around saint’ statues, rosaries, and the like. They needed something new to do. Calvin suggested they make watches. The rest is (watchmaking) history. So, too, the British scholars who came to Geneva needed to work. Calvin suggested they publish a Bible. The rest is English Bible history.



West Suffolk Epistle



West Suffolk Baptist Church

The History of Study Bibles

Continued from Page 6

The Geneva Bible was the first English Bible to use verse divisions, thanks to the work of Robertus Stephanus. Prior editions of the English Bible had chapter breaks only. Stephanus, a brilliant linguist, published several editions of the Greek New Testament. He introduced his innovative verse divisions in his 1551 edition. Nine years later, these same verse numbers appeared in the Geneva Bible.

The Geneva Bible was also the first Bible to have study notes or annotations. The first edition had these annotations in the Gospels only. This edition also had woodcut illustrations, maps, and even tables, which provided a cross-referencing index for names and topics. As later editions rolled off the press, more annotations for the rest of the canonical books appeared. Some later editions even modified the notes or replaced them altogether. Then, as now, the book of Revelation posed special challenges to interpreters and annotators. Later editions fully replaced the notes it had published on John's Apocalypse.

The Geneva Bible was intentionally affordable. Pocket-sized editions were made available, as were inexpensive editions of the New Testament. The Geneva Bible was intended to be read. It was also intended to be studied. And it was. It was the Bible of William Shakespeare, John Bunyan, and the Pilgrims and Puritans who landed in the New World. A Scottish law from 1579 required "every Householder with 300 merks [silver coins]" to own one. Despite King James' attempts in 1611 at positioning his new translation in the market, the Geneva Bible held sway well into the seventeenth century. Countless readers were helped by the notes reflecting the doctrinal understanding of the Reformation.

There has been no shortage of English Bibles since the Geneva Bible. Neither has there been a shortage of study Bibles since the Geneva Bible. By way of an informal nonscientific study, I counted the study Bibles listed in Christian Book Distributors Bibles catalog for spring/summer 2015. Not counting children's Bibles, the number topped one hundred, among them a facsimile edition of the 1560 Geneva Bible. All of these study Bibles except the Geneva Bible date from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

It would not be too much of a stretch to speak of the century spanning from 1917 to the present as "The Century of the Study Bible." In 1917, Oxford University Press published the Scofield Study Bible. This Bible had first been published in 1909 with a system of cross-references. But the 1917 edition had copious notes promoting a dispensational scheme of theology. It was wildly successful. More than two million copies sold in the early years of the 1917 edition. Oxford University Press officials once declared that the Scofield Bible kept them financially afloat through the years of the Great Depression.

Scofield worked his dispensationalism into every text he could, promoting an unhealthy understanding of the gospel. Consider his note on John 1:17 that teaches salvation was not by grace prior to Christ:

As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ. The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation.



West Suffolk Epistle



West Suffolk Baptist Church

The History of Study Bibles

Continued from Page 7

The joke went something like this: You read the English Bible from left to right, the Hebrew Bible from right to left, and the Scofield Bible from the bottom up. In other words, the notes controlled the text. While the joke is funny to a degree, the results are far from humorous. For most of the twentieth century, if you were to walk into a bookstore to purchase a study Bible, you would be hardpressed to find any other option than the Scofield Bible. That changed in 1985, when Zondervan published the NIV Study Bible.

The NIV Study Bible became the new pacesetter for study Bibles. A trans-denominational team set out to produce a consensus Bible that would represent the variety of theological views within evangelicalism. Notes would also include archeological data, and attention would be given to introductions for each book.

The NIV Study Bible marked a study Bible frenzy of sorts. “How to Choose a Study Bible?” was the cover story for a 1996 issue of the Christian Research Journal. A veritable mountain of seven study Bibles provided the cover art.

One of the seven on the cover was The New Geneva Study Bible, first published in 1995 under the editorship of R.C. Sproul. It was renamed the Reformation Study Bible in 1998. Unlike the NIV Study Bible, this study Bible did not seek to represent the broad consensus of evangelicalism; rather, it represented, for the first time since 1560, a study Bible from the Reformed tradition.

The mountain of seven has grown to that hundred-plus number mentioned earlier. There are study Bibles for nearly every denomination or theological point of view. Roman Catholics have The New Jerusalem Bible. The Orthodox Study Bible, The Lutheran Study Bible, and The Wesley Study Bible all serve their respective denominations. Pentecostals and Charismatics have the Spirit-Filled Bible, the Life in the Spirit Study Bible, and others.

In addition, there are study Bibles from nationally known teachers. A standout among these is The MacArthur Study Bible, first published in 1997. A recent publishing phenomenon is to have study Bibles associated with particular historical figures. Hendrickson has published The Matthew Henry Study Bible, bringing his commentary and other writings onto the same pages of a KJV Bible. The same publisher has also released The A.W. Tozer Bible. This trend will likely continue.

Other trends include particularly themed study Bibles such as The Apologetics Study Bible or the NIV Archaeological Study Bible. There are also many “affinity” study Bibles, such as The Firefighter’s Bible, The Marine’s Bible, and so forth. There are gender-specific and age-specific Bibles. Women have their own study Bibles, as do men, as do teens, as do children, and so on.

Perhaps the nadir of this publishing phenomenon was reached with the publication of Revolve Bible, a magazine-formatted study Bible of sorts for teenage girls. This includes a series of notes under the title “Guys Speak Out on Tons of Important Issues.” Among them we find this Q&A:



West Suffolk Epistle



West Suffolk Baptist Church

The History of Study Bibles

Continued from Page 8

Q: Do you ever think about getting married?

A: Kinda, I guess. But not really. Like, I'd never buy a wedding magazine or anything.

But not all recent study Bible publications are to be lamented. The ESV Study Bible and the response to it shows a hunger for intense Bible study. So also is the case with the thoroughly revised version of the Reformation Study Bible. The ESV Study Bible has 2,750 pages and the Reformation Study Bible (2015 edition) has roughly 2,500, both packing a virtual library between their covers.

The mountain of study Bibles keeps growing, but not all growth is necessarily a good thing. The intention of a study Bible is to promote Bible study. Study notes and resources that lead us away from ourselves and our own understanding and toward the biblical text are helpful. When we can't see the text for the notes, study Bibles are not only unhelpful, but they become barriers to our discipleship, leading us down destructive paths. As in all other things, we must be discerning. We must follow only the trustworthy voices.

The Reformers knew that for the church to remain faithful to Christ, the church and her congregants needed both to read and to study the Bible. The 1560 Geneva Bible embodied that commitment. We should be thankful for the gifted teachers and leaders of our own day who have applied their labors to publishing quality study Bibles that are faithful to God's Word. May we take advantage of their labors. Take up a good study Bible and read. ~ **Dr. Stephen J. Nichols - President of Reformation Bible College, chief academic officer for Ligonier Ministries, and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow.**

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.**



West Suffolk Epistle



West Suffolk Baptist Church

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

If you have a birthday or anniversary in March 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 March 2025

Birthdays

Anniversaries

Rory Alexander H. (4)
Jared E. (5)
Marlow S. (12)
Rose M. (15)

Les T. (19)
Hannah L. (20)
Benjamin P. (21)
Hannah E. (23)

Daniel K. (23)
Peggy G. (25)
Jonathan F. (26)
Tom S. (29)

Marlow and Wilma S. (15)
Rick and Peggy G. (31)

Sacrifices Pleasing to God - Hebrews 13:1 - 6

13 Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. ⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" ~ *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.

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