



West Suffolk Epistle



Volume 12 Issue 4

West Suffolk Baptist Church

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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

The First Step of Leadership

In a reaction against sexism, our society practices what you might call *reverse sexism*. Women are given prominence over men, and men are beaten down as irresponsible dullards who can't get anything right. Many men invite and deserve this treatment, caring only for pleasure and entertainment. Many women are glad to give it, thrilled at the chance to turn the tables on male chauvinism. And on it goes, as fallen humans live out the curse of Genesis 3.

But it should not be so with Christian men and women. We are to be peaceful and orderly, reflecting the character of God. That's why, in 1 Timothy 2 and 3, Paul sets both genders straight, teaching them God's design for men and women in the church. He addresses men first, reminding them of their responsibility to lead. And the first role in which they lead is the vital area of prayer.

In 1 Timothy 2:8 Paul begins his instruction with this command: "*Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.*" That text sets the backdrop for the call to pray. "*Therefore*" refers to the first seven verses of 1 Timothy 2, which discuss the importance of praying for all people—especially non-Christian authorities. The responsibility of offering public prayer is the special duty of men.

The Greek word translated "men" in verse 8 refers to men not in the generic sense, but to men in contrast to women. Men are to be the leaders when the church meets for corporate worship. In the Jewish synagogue, only men were permitted to pray, and that practice was continued in the church. The Greek phrase translated "in every place" refers to an official assembly of the church (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:8). Paul was saying that no matter where the church officially gathers, select men are to lead in public prayer.

Some claim that contradicts 1 Corinthians 11:5, where Paul permits women to pray and proclaim the Word. That passage, however, must be interpreted in light of 1 Corinthians 14:34, which forbids women to speak in the assembly. Women are permitted to pray and proclaim the Word, but not when the church meets for its official worship service. That in no way marks women as spiritually inferior (cf. Galatians 3:28) — not all men proclaim the Word in the assembly either, only those called and gifted to do so.

The second half of 1 Timothy 2:8—"*Lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension*"—specifies how men are to pray. The emphasis there is not on lifting literal hands but on offering worship in holiness. It's a specific qualification for the men selected to lead prayer in public worship: They must live holy lives. And their inner attitude is "*without wrath and dissension.*" Church leaders are not characterized by anger and strife; they are to have loving, peacemaking hearts.

Leading the congregation to God in prayer is a simple way to begin leading in the church. But at the same time, it's a tremendous responsibility. By stepping up to take on that role, men can both serve the church and challenge our culture's low view of men. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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5 Things You Should Know about the Doctrine of the Trinity

1. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most fundamental doctrines in Christianity.

The Christian doctrine of God is the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Christian doctrine of God is foundational to every other Christian doctrine. There is no doctrine of Scripture (bibliology) apart from the doctrine of God because Scripture is the Word of God. Human beings are created in the image of God. Sin is rebellion against the law of God. Soteriology is the doctrine having to do with the redemptive work of God. The church is the people of God. Eschatology has to do with the final goals and plans of God.

2. The doctrine of the Trinity was not invented at the Council of Nicaea.

There is a popular myth today that the doctrine of the Trinity was invented in the fourth century at the Council of Nicaea. This is not true. In the first centuries of the church, Christians were already teaching the fundamental doctrines they found in Scripture. Scripture teaches that there is one—and only one—God. Scripture also teaches that the Father is God. Scripture teaches that the Son is God and that the Holy Spirit is God. Furthermore, Scripture teaches that the Father is not the Son or the Spirit, that the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and that the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. Anybody who held these basic propositions of Scripture held to the foundations of the doctrine of the Trinity. Over the centuries, there arose those whose teaching denied or distorted one or more of those biblical teachings. The Council of Nicaea was called to respond to one such teaching—the teaching of Arius, who had denied that the Son is God. The Nicene Creed provided boundaries to ensure that the church teaches everything Scripture affirms.

3. The doctrine of the Trinity is not fully comprehensible to human minds.

The doctrine of the Trinity, along with the doctrine of the incarnation, is one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith. This means that it exceeds the ability of finite human minds to fully grasp. If we treat the doctrine of the Trinity like some kind of math puzzle, requiring only the right amount of ingenuity to solve, we will inevitably fall into one heresy or another. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a Rubik's Cube. There is nothing in creation that is a precise analogy to the doctrine of the Trinity.

4. Most popular Trinitarian analogies are misleading at best and heretical at worst.

Because there is nothing in creation that is a precise analogy to the doctrine of the Trinity, most popular Trinitarian analogies are misleading at best and heretical at worst. Most end up suggesting that the three persons of the Trinity are three parts of God (e.g., the clover analogy; or the egg shell, yolk, and egg white analogy), or that they are three modes or roles of a unitarian God (e.g., the Father, Son, and Spirit “masks”; or the water, ice, and steam analogies). At best, some analogies are perhaps able to illustrate a certain aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity, but they all tend to deny one or more elements of biblical teaching.



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5. Misunderstandings regarding who Jesus is tend to lead to misunderstandings of the doctrine of the Trinity.

In the incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, assumed a human nature, which is united to the divine nature. The human nature includes His body and His soul. This means that the Lord Jesus Christ is God-incarnate. He is one Person with two natures, and those two natures are united in the one Person of the Son without confusion, change, division, or separation. Since both natures are His natures, everything that is true of either nature is said of Him, the one Lord Jesus Christ. However, some things are said of Him according to His divine nature (e.g., being the Creator of the world) and others are said of Him according to His human nature (e.g., getting hungry or thirsty). If we confuse the divine and human natures of Christ, it will easily distort our doctrine of the Trinity, because we will read human attributes into God. For example, the Bible teaches that God is immortal (1 Timothy 6:15–16). In other words, God cannot die. But don't we believe that Jesus is God? And didn't Jesus die on the cross? Yes, He did, and He did so according to His human nature. A human can die. A human can suffer. A human can change. Jesus did all of these in His human nature, but we can't transfer those human attributes into the divine nature. The divine nature cannot die or change or suffer. Similarly, Christ perfectly submitted His human will to the divine will of God, but that doesn't mean that the divine will of the Son was submitted to the divine will of the Father. Why not? Because there is only one divine will. The Son's divine will is the same divine will as that of the Father because the Son is God just as the Father is God. To use the language of the Nicene Creed, the Son is *homoousios* with the Father. If the Son's divine will is submitted to the Father's divine will, we no longer have the Trinity. We have polytheism. ~ **Dr. Keith A. Mathison - Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Fla.**

The Dobbs Decision: The State Being the State

Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. offered a succinct and profound statement on the relationship of church and state when he said, "*The church is not calling the state to be the church. The church is calling the state to be the state.*" When the state, and specifically the Supreme Court of the United States, decided *Roe v. Wade*, the state abdicated its role as the state. The decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* is a major leap back to the state's rightful position.

That rightful position of the state can be found in the opening chapters of Genesis and also in what may very well be the most brilliant documents in the history of political philosophy—namely, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to the Constitution, ratified in 1791). The Declaration of Independence's opening sentence appeals to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." That is the most stable, worthy, and certain foundation for all the particular laws that govern a body politic. The very next sentence enumerates particular "unalienable rights"—that is to say, rights that are absolute. They are not invented or created by human institutions. They exist. They are. Those rights govern men and are "endowed by their Creator." Those rights are "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."



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Liberty was the watchword of the modern revolutions, overthrowing the rule of the monarchies for the rule of law. But notice what comes first in the list of rights: life. The right to life is the fundamental and foundational human right. The founders of the United States may very well have invented a government with its three branches and bicameral legislature, but it did not invent the right to life. The Declaration merely declared what is already reality.

The right to life stems from one unalterable truth: All human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27; 2:7–8). That means one unalterable conclusion: Murder is a violation of nature (Genesis 4; Exodus 20:13). That all human beings are created in the image of God means that all of human life is to be preserved and protected, and every body politic has the main function of protecting life. Governments that protect life are good, honorable, and just. Governments that don't protect life are not good, are dishonorable, and unjust.

This is why governmentally sanctioned abortion is so egregious. This is why abortion is the abdication of the state's role. Abortion is especially egregious because of the victim, who is powerless and vulnerable. The Supreme Court suborned injustice in the Roe decision.

One thing we know is that sin has consequences. The Roe decision had consequences not only for the tens of millions of lives aborted, but it also had consequences for the broader culture. Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr., Francis Schaeffer, and others spoke of the culture of death. This is clearly illustrated in the work of Peter Singer, a longtime professor of ethics at Princeton University, who wrote,

I do not deny that if one accepts abortion on the grounds provided in chapter 6, the case for killing human beings, in other circumstances, is strong. Euthanasia is not something to be regarded with horror.

Singer refers to chapter six of his book, in which he argues that the unborn child (he exclusively uses the word fetus) is not a life, and Singer further argues that the entire notion of sanctity of life is wrong. Then he moves from the fetus to the infant: “If we can put aside these emotionally moving but strictly irrelevant aspects of the killing of a baby we can see that the grounds for not killing persons do not apply to newborn infants.” We need to follow Singer's train of thought. He denies the sanctity of human life. Then he justifies abortion as perfectly fine, even required in some cases. Then he justifies infanticide. Then he justifies euthanasia. This is “Exhibit A” of the culture of death, and this is the consequence of an unjust decision like Roe.

Dobbs is not a perfect decision. As many have observed, Dobbs returns the issue of abortion to the states. The political battle over the abortion pill has already started. That is sadly true. Some also have pointed out that some elements of the concurrences of the Supreme Court Justices of the majority opinion were weak (Justice Clarence Thomas being the notable exception). Dobbs is not the end of the legal battles, but merely the beginning of a new phase. All that to say, the fight for life and the end of legalized abortion is not over.



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Nevertheless, there is much to celebrate here. The Dobbs decision is a giant step back to the culture of life declared in Genesis 1–2 and beautifully echoed in the founding documents of the United States. The decision of Dobbs holds, “The Constitution does not confer a right to abortion.” Those few words overturn decades of injustice and the murder of tens of millions of lives. Those few words uphold the Constitution, which is the singular task of the judicial system. The Dobbs decision is the state being the state—as ordained by God.

Genesis 1–2 does not present an exclusively Christian ethic. These two chapters present the foundational ethics that govern human beings and their interaction with one other. Genesis 1–2 is the basis of ethics and law. Genesis 1–2 is what lets the state know that the state is to uphold the sanctity of all human life. For decades, faithful Christians have advocated for the state to be the state on the issue of abortion and to reverse Roe. Dobbs is the state fulfilling its obligation as the state. ~ *Dr. Stephen J. Nichols - President of Reformation Bible College, Chief Academic Officer for Ligonier Ministries, and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow*

The Heart Restored

As we consider the history of God’s people in the Old Testament, we do not observe a people who served the Lord faithfully. The people of Israel did not demonstrate their love for God with all their hearts. Even some of the great heroes of Israel manifested the depths of depravity in their lives.

Nevertheless, it is through our careful study of Israel’s past that we find great comfort. With spiritually discerning minds, we have been given the ability to understand the way in which God’s redemption of His people has been displayed throughout history. As such, we possess insight into the unfolding drama of redemption, from the beginning of life itself to the very end when death itself is conquered.

It is for no small reason that God’s record of His people is replete with stories of failure and renewal. For it is in the history of redemption that the patient God of Israel restores His people time after time, demonstrating His enduring love and faithfulness. Despite their lawlessness and rebellion, the people of God in the Old Testament were repeatedly brought to repentance by the kindness of God and were always renewed in their sweet communion with Him. This common theme of restoration is perhaps best illustrated in the life of David who was the son of Jesse, the shepherd of Bethlehem, the defender of the kingdom of God, the king of Israel, the adulterer, the deceiver, and the murderer. In the biblical portrait of David, we observe a man whose heart was broken by his sin and healed by his Lord.

Upon the occasion of David’s anointing, we recall the words of God to Samuel concerning David’s older brother Eliab:

Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)



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The boldness and sheer magnificence of these words demand that we hearken to the words of Samuel when he proclaimed to Saul that *“the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart...to be prince over his people”* (1 Samuel 13:14). David was a man after God’s own heart, not because the heart of David was pure. Rather, he was a man after God’s own heart precisely because he understood that his heart was not pure, and for that reason he hid the Word of God in his heart so that he might not sin against the Lord and so that he might love the Lord with all his heart, *Coram Deo*. ~ *Dr. Burk Parsons - Senior Pastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, Fla., Chief Editorial Officer for Ligonier Ministries, Executive Editor of Tabletalk Magazine, and a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow*

Never Safe, Always Safe: The Paradox of God’s Providence

Years ago my wife was hit in the side of her car by a truck driver at an intersection. We call that an accident. I don’t think the truck driver with malice aforethought intended in his mind to ram into the side of my wife’s car with his truck. He didn’t mean to do it. And since he didn’t mean it, and my wife didn’t mean it, and no one else apparently meant it, we call it an accident. But we still have to ask the question. Where was God in all of it? Where was God in the accidents you have experienced in your life?

On September 22, 1993, my wife and I were involved in an unforgettable accident. We were traveling by train from Memphis to Orlando, with a stopover in New Orleans. The previous evening, we boarded a train named the Sunset Limited in New Orleans. We entered the last car in the sleeping compartment and retired for the night, comfortable, peaceful, and assuming that on the morrow we would reach our destination and be home. But everything changed without warning. At three in the morning, I awoke flying through the air, a human projectile experiencing the law of inertia. The train had crashed while it was going seventy miles an hour. Now, when you are in a vehicle that is going seventy miles an hour, and it stops, you continue to go seventy miles an hour. I was in a state of motion. And I was going to stay in motion until something stopped that motion, and what stopped that motion was the wall. I bounced off the wall in the pitch dark amid the screeching noise of metal against metal. I realized we were in the middle of a wreck. But in the intensity of the moment, the first thought that came into my mind was “Is my wife all right?” And she had the same thought about me. We both cried out to each other in the dark, “Are you all right, honey?” She assured me that she was fine and I assured her that I was fine, and then our brief conversation was interrupted by the screams of a woman in the next compartment. She was screaming that she was bleeding and couldn’t get out of her room.

The cabin steward banged on my door and on her door, trying to determine how many people were injured. I went into the hallway and helped the cabin steward get the woman’s door open. She was not fatally injured, but she was very frightened. At that point, my assumptions changed. When we first crashed, I assumed that we had been involved in an accident at a crossroad, that the train had hit a vehicle. But as I walked down the hall and looked out the window, I saw a gigantic ball of flame rising about seventy-five feet in the air outside my window.



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At that point, I thought we must have hit a tanker truck. I still wasn't sure what was going on. We were on the second floor of a double-decker train. People climbed down the stairwell and out the back of the train. We hurried away from the back of the train, away from flames that were coming in our direction. After a few moments, I circled around and came back toward the back of the train to see what was going on. I could see that there was a searchlight of some kind; later I learned it was the searchlight of a boat. The boat had actually caused the accident by hitting the railroad bridge.

Against a backdrop of flame and fog, I could see two train cars in the water. As I stood there and watched, suddenly a ball of fire went through one train car and out the empty end of it, like fire in a funnel. I thought, "If there's anybody still on that car, they have no hope." What I didn't know was that underneath that car was another car submerged on the bottom of the river, where almost no one had survived.

We then sat down on the tracks and huddled with groups of people, a large number of whom had been cast into the water by the train wreck and had managed to swim to shore or were rescued by people on the riverbanks. We all tried to help one another get comfortable as we waited for rescue. But the accident had taken place in the middle of a remote part of Alabama. There was no access to the site by car. There were no roads. The only way in was by rail, and in this case it was a single track, not a double track. The only access was by air or by water.

We began to hear the sounds of a helicopter, but it couldn't land because the flames were so high and intense. A tugboat captain and his crew rescued about seventeen people from the water. But we were told to remain where we were. Finally a train approached us from the rear, and we experienced a sense of "we're going to be rescued."

But the train stopped and just sat, and eventually it backed up and left, and we had no idea why. We later learned that it was a freight train. And when it came upon the accident, it radioed back to Mobile. The people in Mobile already knew from the Coast Guard messages that there had been an accident, but they didn't know the severity of it. They had assembled all their rescue crews in Mobile, prepared the hospitals, gone into their catastrophe alert program, and assembled four hundred rescue people on a train to bring them to the site. But they couldn't bring the train in because the freight train was blocking the tracks. So they had to wait for the freight train to back up all the way to Mobile before they could send the rescue train in. Between the time of the accident and the time the rescue train arrived, three hours had passed.

When the rescue train came, triage was implemented. The most severely injured went to the closest car, and those who were safe and relatively unhurt walked along the sharp rocks of the roadbed and went to the final car on the train. That's what my wife and I did. Vesta and I boarded the last car in the train. I don't know how many people were in that car, but we were the people who were the least injured. We rode to Mobile, which took another hour. And during that time, two passengers on our car had heart attacks from the trauma.



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We heard story after story from other passengers about their experiences, but there was no panic. There was no mob violence. People were working together in this situation. We knew that there had to be some fatalities, but nobody knew that this accident was the worst accident in the history of Amtrak, that this accident killed more people than all other fatal incidents in the history of Amtrak combined.

We didn't really realize that until we got to Mobile. The sun was just now coming up, and as we looked out, we saw more than a hundred ambulances gathered to meet us.

Again, more triage took place. We were put on a bus that would take us to the farthest hospital because we were the least injured. Again, it took another hour before we got to that destination. When we arrived in front of the hospital, we were amazed at the number of people there to meet us. I couldn't help but notice the name of the hospital: **Providence Hospital**. There we were treated with great tenderness, compassion, and kindness.

When I was finally able to call our family at home, I felt like Peter coming to the door where the people had been praying for him. They shut the door in his face because they thought it was Peter's ghost. When I called, I discovered one of our vice presidents and my son had already left for the airport to fly to Mobile, not knowing whether they were coming for bodies or to bring us home. We met them at the Mobile airport and returned home. The accident made national news, and I was besieged by newspaper reporters and television people who wanted to interview me.

But when I reflected on everything afterward, the thing that struck me was the questions people asked me. They asked me many silly questions. But the one that they asked most frequently was "Why do you suppose you were so lucky? Why do you think your life was spared and forty-seven other people's lives were taken? Don't you really feel lucky?"

I answered: "No, I don't feel particularly lucky. Maybe I would have been lucky if I had missed the train. But I don't consider these kinds of events matters of luck. I know that my life was in the hands of God." "But weren't the other people's lives in the hands of God?" I was asked. "Absolutely, they were."

I heard all kinds of stories later. I heard the story of one couple who met some friends in New Orleans. They were in the sleeping car, but their friends did not have a ticket for the sleeping car. And so the couple moved out of the sleeping car and went forward into one of the other cars, and they perished. How lucky is that?

"Why did you live and somebody else didn't?" I was asked. I said: "I don't know. Maybe tomorrow God will take my life. He could have taken it tonight. I know that that night was not my time in the providence of God to die, but it was the time for other people to die." That train rushing at seventy miles an hour, out of control once the bridge collapsed and there was no longer any track for it to run on, was not out of the control of God. The engineer had no control. The tugboat captain had no control. The passengers had no control. But the hand of God was there.



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As hard as it is for us to deal with tragedy, it is comforting to know that my life and my death are in God's hands. Somebody asked me, "What did you learn about this theologically?" I said: "I could give you a pious-sounding statement, but I really didn't learn anything because I already knew that my life was in the hands of the providence of God. I already believed in the providence of God before this accident took place. Now, I learned something existentially. I learned something experientially. My doctrine was confirmed through the reality of this situation."

What I found out is that you are never safe. I wasn't safe when I thought I was safe. But I also found out, paradoxically, though not contradictorily, that I am always safe. That is to say, from a human perspective, we are never really safe, but from a divine perspective, if your life is in the hands of God, you are always in a situation of perfect safety. Even those who perished, perished by the hand of God safely. My ultimate security and safety do not rest in the plans and provisions I make for this world, but they rest in the provisions of God. And if it's God's provision that my life is to end, I would much rather understand that it's in His hands rather than assume that I am a victim of blind impersonal forces over which neither God nor man has any control.

I don't mean that God reached out from heaven, grabbed that train, and threw it off the bridge and into the water. I don't mean anything as crass as that. But if we believe in God, then we have to believe that the invisible hand of God was sovereignly involved in the Alabama train wreck because God's providence extends where human roads don't. It extends into the night. It extends into the bayou. It extends into the darkness. It extends into the flame. It extends into the wreck. It extends into the wreck of your life, and it extends into every accident you've ever experienced, because we believe that God is a God of providence.

When a child asks, "Why does such and such happen?" we give the brief answer "Because." When we say "because," we are saying that there is something that produced this result. There is a cause.

Though there is such a thing as cause and effect in the world, all power ultimately rests with God. God is the supreme cause of everything that comes to pass. He doesn't necessarily do it directly or immediately. He may, and often does, work through causes that are found in this world, but His sovereignty extends over all things, and, ultimately, there is no such thing as an accident.

Now, causes are important for us. We need to know why the grass grows and why the grass dies. We go to doctors to find out what's causing our pain and illness. But we tend to look at secondary causes. The Christian needs to go deeper and look behind the temporal causes of this world and see the invisible hand of God's providence. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

If you have a birthday or anniversary in April 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 April 2025

Birthdays

Amber H. (4)
Carol L. (7)

David A. (8)
Raena Grace P. (20)

Anniversaries

Walt and Carol L. (15)
Jack and Rita B. (16)

Submission to the Authorities - Romans 13:1-7

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. ~ *ESV*



West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership

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