



## *West Suffolk Epistle*



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*West Suffolk Baptist Church*

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## *Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant*

### *God's Standard for Leadership*

*April 4, 2025*

Not everyone is cut out for leadership in the church. That's why Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 expands on his instruction for men by describing the categories and qualifications for church leadership. In verse 1 he says, *"It is a trustworthy statement; if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do."*

An essential requirement for a church leader is that he be a man. Women have a vitally important role in the church, the home, and in society. That role, however, does not include leadership over God's people. While both men and women can serve in a variety of ways under the general and broad category of deacon (1 Timothy 3:8–13), Paul makes it clear that the leadership of the church is limited to men.

*"Overseer"* refers to those men who are called by God to lead His church. In the New Testament the terms overseer, pastor, and elder all refer to the same office (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Peter 5:1–2). Among their responsibilities are ruling, preaching, and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17), praying for the sick (James 5:14), caring for the church, setting an example for the people to follow (1 Peter 5:1–3), establishing church policy (Acts 15:22–33), and ordaining other leaders (1 Timothy 4:14).

The character and effectiveness of any church is directly related to the quality of its leadership. That's why the Bible stresses the importance of qualified church leadership and delineates specific standards for evaluating those who would serve in that sacred position. Failure to adhere to those standards has caused many of the problems that churches throughout the world currently face.

It is significant that Paul's description of the qualifications for overseers focuses on their character rather than their function. That's because a man is qualified by who he is, not by what he does.

And those spiritual qualifications are nonnegotiable. I am convinced they are part of what determines whether a man is indeed called by God to the ministry. Bible schools and seminaries can help equip a man for ministry. Church boards and pulpit committees can extend opportunities for him to serve. But only God can call a man and make him fit for the ministry. And that call is not a matter of analyzing one's talents and then selecting the best career option. It's a Spirit-generated compulsion to be a man of God and serve Him in the church. Those whom God calls will meet the qualifications.

Why are the standards so high? Because whatever the leaders are, the people become. As Hosea said, *"Like people, like priest"* (Hosea 4:9). Jesus said, *"Everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher"* (Luke 6:40). Biblical history demonstrates that people will seldom rise above the spiritual level of their leadership.



## *West Suffolk Epistle*



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

## *God's Standard for Leadership*

*Continued from Page 1*

You might think these qualifications don't apply to you because you don't sense God's call. Yet the only significant difference between an elder's qualifications and those of a deacon is that an elder must be skilled as a teacher (1 Timothy 3:1–13). In addition, Paul applies most of these character qualities to all believers in his other letters. So in that sense, whether you are male or female, these qualities ought to be the goals in your Christian life. But if you are a man seeking a position of leadership, you must meet the required qualifications.

While Paul begins by commending the man who desires the office of elder (1 Timothy 3:1), no one should ever be placed into church leadership on desire alone. It is the church's responsibility to affirm a man's qualifications for ministry by measuring him against God's standard for leadership as delineated in verses 2–7.

A fundamental, universal requirement for an overseer is that he “*must be above reproach*” (1 Timothy 3:2). It is an absolute necessity. The Greek text indicates that being above reproach is the man's present state—he has sustained a reputation for being irreproachable. There's nothing to accuse him of. It doesn't refer to sins he committed before he matured as a Christian—unless those sins remain a blight on his life.

A church leader's life must not be marred by sin or vice—be it an attitude, habit, or incident. That's not to say he must be perfect, but there must not be any obvious defect in his character. He must be a model of godliness so he can legitimately call his congregation to follow his example (Philippians 3:17). That is a high standard, but it isn't a double standard. Since you are responsible to follow the example of your godly leaders (Hebrews 13:7, 17), God requires you to be above reproach as well. The difference is that certain sins can disqualify church leaders for life, whereas that's not necessarily true for less prominent roles in the church. Nevertheless, God requires blamelessness of all believers (Ephesians 1:4; Philippians 1:10; Colossians 1:22; 2 Peter 3:14; Jude 24).

A church leader disqualifies himself when his unrighteousness communicates to others that one can live in sin and still be a spiritual leader. Malicious people are always looking for ways to discredit the reputation of Christ and His church. A sinful leader plays right into their hands, giving them an unparalleled opportunity to justify their lack of belief.

It's not coincidental that many pastors fall into sin and disqualify themselves from ministry. Satan works hard at undermining the integrity of spiritual leaders, because in so doing, he destroys their ministries and brings reproach upon Christ. Therefore spiritual leaders must guard their thoughts and actions carefully, and congregations must pray earnestly for the strength of their leadership. An unholy pastor is like a stained-glass window: a religious symbol that obscures the light. That's why the initial qualification for spiritual leadership is blamelessness. As Paul delineates the other qualifications for overseers, he simply expands on the particulars of what it means to be above reproach. ~

***Dr. John MacArthur***



## *West Suffolk Epistle*



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

## *The Threat of Apostasy*

Hebrews 6: 4 - 6

Clearly, the author of Hebrews intended to guide everyone in his original audience beyond the basics of the Christian faith into full spiritual maturity. However, he also understood that this could happen only if the Lord so willed it (Hebrews 6:1–3). Some could not be guided into maturity, namely, the people identified in today's passage—those who commit final apostasy by abandoning the Christian faith and never coming back.

Hebrews 6:4–6 features perhaps the best-known warning passage in all of Scripture, and almost certainly the most-used proof text for those who believe that people who exercise true saving faith in Jesus can lose their salvation. However, we confess that this interpretation fails in light of the entire witness of Scripture and even the book of Hebrews itself. Matthew 1:21, for instance, tells us that Jesus will unfailingly save His people—all His people—from their sins. Romans 8:29–30 reveals that everyone who is justified—united to Christ and declared righteous through faith alone—will also be glorified. Hebrews 10:14 explains that Jesus' atonement has perfected for all time all those who are now being sanctified, and one cannot be sanctified apart from true faith in Christ (Acts 26:12–18). Thus, we must agree with the respected twentieth-century New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce, who wrote that the author of Hebrews "*is not questioning the perseverance of the saints; we might say that rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints.*"

Yet, what are we to make of the description in Hebrews 6:4–6 of the people who cannot be restored to repentance after falling away?

*<sup>4</sup> For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (Hebrews 6:4 - 6) - **ESV***

The basic answer is that the characteristics given in these verses need not apply only to true Christians, to those who possess the faith they profess. They can be true also of those who come very close to placing their trust in Jesus, to those who make a profession of faith and join the church when their hearts are not truly in it. After all, professing members of the visible church who do not really believe can see the powers of the age to come in the love believers have for one another and in how God answers the prayers of His people. They might appreciate the goodness and truth of God's Word, even believing it is factually true, without personally trusting Jesus to save them from their sins. The bottom line is that a mere profession of faith never saves anyone. But those who possess faith will persevere in it until the end. ~ **Ligonier Ministries**

## *Coram Deo*

If we are Christians long enough, we will see some people who seemed to be believers reject the faith. However, we cannot see the heart, so we do not know who has committed final apostasy or who is in a season of serious backsliding. Thus, we should continue to pray for those who have rejected Jesus and even reach out to them as we are able. God may yet bring them to Christ.





## *West Suffolk Epistle*



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

## *The Difference Between Judas and Peter*

The intercession of our Great High Priest is the foundation for our confidence when it comes to our perseverance. It also helps us make sense of the accounts of Peter and Judas, two of Jesus' disciples who experienced a serious fall. One disciple's fall away from Christ is seen as a final and full work of apostasy, whereas the other disciple's fall is not final and full because he is restored. And we see that their crime against Christ was very similar. Judas betrayed Jesus. And that same night, Peter denied Christ.

These two men who had been disciples with Jesus during His earthly ministry committed treason against Him in His darkest hour. And there are further similarities in these two examples in that Jesus predicted both Peter's and Judas' diabolical acts. But we recall that when Jesus said, "*One of you will betray me,*" the disciples said among themselves, "*Who is it, Lord? Is it I?*" When Judas asked, "*Is it I, Rabbi?*" Jesus said to him, "*You have said so*" (Matthew 26:25). Jesus' final words to Judas were "*What you are going to do, do quickly*" (John 13:27). And He dismissed him from their presence.

When Jesus prophesied that Peter would deny Him, Peter protested profusely. "*Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away,*" he said (Matthew 26:33). This brings to mind Paul's admonition, "*Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall*" (1 Corinthians 10:12), because Jesus then turned to Simon and said to him in loving terms, "*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat*" (Luke 22:31).

Sifting wheat is not a laborious task that only the strong can perform. It may take time and it may be tedious, but it's not labor intensive. In using this metaphor, Jesus is cautioning Simon not to rely on his own strength, because it would be an easy thing for Satan to entice him to fall. Satan is stronger than Peter, and would have no trouble overcoming whatever strength Peter thought he had.

Notice, however, that Jesus does not say to Peter, "*What you are going to do, do quickly.*" Our Lord's words to Simon Peter were significantly different from what He said to Judas. He said, "*I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*" (Luke 22:32).

Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't simply hope that Peter will be able to resist Satan, or that he will return, or that he will be able to strengthen the brothers. He expresses certainty that Peter will do these things. There was no doubt in Jesus' mind not only that Peter would fall, and fall abysmally, but also that Peter would be restored. Indeed, history testifies that Peter, in spite of this radical and serious fall, nevertheless endured to the end. He repented, he was forgiven, he was restored, and he endured to the end. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



## *West Suffolk Epistle*



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

## *The Ground of All Forgiveness*

Forgiveness. Nothing is more foreign to sinful human nature. And nothing is more characteristic of divine grace.

Fallen humanity finds God's forgiveness terribly hard to understand. As individual sinners, we all know firsthand what a struggle it can be to forgive others who have wronged us. Some people therefore find it impossible to envision Almighty God as anything other than stern and unforgiving. Others, knowing that Scripture teaches us God is merciful, imagine that He is so completely indulgent that no sinner really has anything to fear. Both misconceptions are fatally wrong concerning divine forgiveness.

Compounding that problem, our attitude toward forgiveness tends to vary, depending on which side of the equation we look at. When we are on the receiving end of mercy, we naturally esteem forgiveness as one of the highest of all virtues. But when we are the aggrieved party, forgiveness often seems a gross violation of justice!

And yet, all would no doubt recognize *both* justice and mercy as great virtues. Who among us does not desire to be forgiven when we know we have done wrong? And who does not despise injustice, particularly when we are the ones against whom a wrong has been committed?

So how do we reconcile these two great virtues, justice and mercy? More important, how can *God* reconcile them? If He hates injustice, how can He countenance the forgiveness of a transgressor? How can a perfectly holy God pardon sinners?

*That's easy for God, you may be thinking. After all, He can simply choose to forgive us and declare all our offenses null and void. He can just excuse the sinner and let sin go unpunished.*

But that is a deficient view of God and an unbiblical way of looking at forgiveness. God cannot and will not simply acquit transgressors by ignoring the evil they have done. To do so would be unjust, and God is a God of perfect justice.

Here we must be extremely careful to keep our thinking biblical. Some people tend to take the grace and forgiveness of God for granted, while ignoring His absolute righteousness. Others thunder a lot about the justice of God, while saying little about His grace. Both truths must be kept in balance if we are to understand what Scripture teaches about forgiveness.

### **First, the Bad News**

God does not forgive by simply looking the other way when we sin. The Bible repeatedly stresses that God will punish every sin. Galatians 6:7, for example, gives us this solemn warning: "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*" In Exodus 23:7 God says, "*I will not acquit the guilty.*" Nahum 1:3 is unequivocal: "*The Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.*" In the gospel message itself, "*God's wrath is revealed ... against all ungodliness and unrighteousness*" (Romans 1:18).



## *West Suffolk Epistle*



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

## *The Ground of All Forgiveness*

*Continued from Page 5*

Scripture describes the relationship between God and the sinner as enmity (Romans 5:10; 8:7). God hates sin, and therefore all who sin have made themselves God's enemies. "*God is angry with the wicked every day*" (Psalm 7:11, KJV). He hates those who do iniquity (Psalm 5:5).

All sinners are in the same boat. Those who violate some minor point of God's law are as guilty as if they had broken every commandment (James 2:10). And the real truth is that no one's sins are trivial (Romans 3:10–18). All people are born with an insatiable penchant for sin (Psalm 58:3). They are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), reveling in their own sin, objects of God's holy anger (v. 3), and utterly without hope (v. 12). From the human perspective, this is a truly desperate state of absolute futility.

God, on the other hand, is perfect, infinitely holy, absolutely flawless, and thoroughly righteous. His justice must be satisfied by the punishment of every violation of His law. And the due penalty of our iniquity is infinitely severe: eternal damnation. Nothing we can offer God could possibly atone for our sin, because the price of sin is too high.

Fallen humanity's predicament is as bleak as it can be. Every person is a sinner, caught under the looming sword of God's judgment. By nature we are "*children of wrath*" (Ephesians 2:3), utterly enslaved to our own sin (John 8:34). We have no innate ability to love God, to obey God, or to please Him by any means (Romans 8:7–8).

The situation seems irreversible: we are accountable to a holy God whose justice must be satisfied, and yet we are guilty sinners, incapable of doing anything whatsoever to satisfy God's justice. Left to ourselves, we would all be doomed.

Any hope of the sinner's ever being justified by any means would seem to be out of the question. God Himself says it is an abomination to justify a sinner, equal to the sin of declaring an innocent person guilty: "*He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD*" (Proverbs 17:15). "*He who says to the wicked, 'You are righteous,' peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him*" (Proverbs 24:24).

Again and again, God Himself expressly forbids anyone to declare a sinful person righteous.

### **Now, the Good News**

But Scripture tells us that God does justify the ungodly (Romans 4:5). He covers their transgressions (v. 7). He refuses to take their misdeeds into account (v. 8). He declares them righteous, completely forgiving their sins. Do you see why the Gospel is such good news?

How can God grant such forgiveness without compromising His own standard of justice? How can He justify sinners without rendering Himself unjust? How can He forgive sinners without breaking His own Word, having already sworn that He will punish every transgression?





## *West Suffolk Epistle*



# *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

## *The Ground of All Forgiveness*

Continued from Page 6

The answer is: *God Himself has made His Son, Jesus Christ, the atonement for our sins.*

Multitudes of Christians would nod their heads knowingly at the sound of that statement. But comparatively few are actually well-equipped to articulate the doctrine of the Atonement clearly, or to defend it against the many attacks that the enemies of truth constantly lob its way.

This truth lies at the very heart of the gospel message. It is the most glorious truth in all of Scripture. It explains how God can remain just while justifying sinners (Romans 3:25–26). And it is the only hope for any sinner seeking forgiveness. ~ **Dr. John F. MacArthur, Jr.**—*The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*

## *Awaiting His Return*

There is a widespread fascination with the end of the world. Throughout history, we have witnessed the bold assertions of soothsayers, naysayers, and doomsdayers. Every day, self-proclaimed prophets of the end times make whimsical predictions about the future. Claiming to have biblical authority, they tout their cleverly devised schemes about the end of the world as we know it, and by reading between the lines of the Old Testament prophetic books, they carefully contort the words of sacred Scripture to fit their fictional fantasies about the second advent of Christ.

Christians throughout the world have become so enamored with some obscure aspect about the second advent of Christ that they construct their entire systems of doctrine upon what might happen—not upon what has happened. We are, indeed, called to live with eager expectation of the second advent of Christ, but we should only do so in light of the first advent of Christ. In remembrance of Christ's first advent, it is not enough simply to wish Jesus a happy birthday. In fact, to do so borders on blasphemy. Instead, we are called to remember and to celebrate the incarnation of the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Logos.

At the first advent of Jesus Christ, the fullness of time had come and God sent forth His Son into this fallen world. As the prophets foretold, He was born of a virgin who was richly blessed of God. He was born under the law of God, not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. As was necessary to redeem those under the Law, He fulfilled the righteous demands of the Law and took upon Himself the sins of His people, His sheep for whom He laid down His life.

As His people, we confess that Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead. We believe He will return to this world not as a babe in a manger but as the King of all the earth, in power and glory to manifest His reign over the new heavens and the new earth.

We confess His return because of what He taught us at His first advent and on account of the hope that is within us. For this reason, during the wonderful Advent season that comes each year, we should eagerly await the second advent of Christ as we celebrate the first advent of Christ. Nevertheless, let us always be mindful that although Christmas day comes only once a year, we are called to remember and celebrate the eternal work of Christ—past, present, and future—each day of our lives coram Deo, before the face of God. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons**



## *West Suffolk Epistle*



### *West Suffolk Baptist Church*

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If you have a birthday or anniversary in May 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](mailto:gwlcf10415@gmail.com).

#### ***Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner May 2025***

##### *Birthdays*

*Elyse T. (1)*  
*Patrick D. (2)*  
*Camila S. (5)*  
*Mike M. (22)*

*Jonathan K. (25)*  
*John H. (30)*  
*Oliver H. (30)*

##### *Anniversaries*

*Nic and Katie G. (22)*  
*Tom and Marcy S. (22)*  
*Ben and Charlene S. (25)*

#### ***Besides Me There is No God - Isaiah 44:6 - 8***

<sup>6</sup>Thus says the Lord; the King of Israel and his Redeemer; the Lord of hosts; I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. <sup>7</sup>Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. <sup>8</sup>Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God beside me? There is no "Rock; I know not any." ~ *ESV*



### ***West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership***

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