



West Suffolk Epistle



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West Suffolk Baptist Church

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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Justice and Unconditional Forgiveness

We all know that forgiveness is a good thing, but shouldn't there be consequences for wrongdoing? Is it possible for forgiveness and justice to go hand in hand?

There is a clear illustration of this in the book of Hebrews. The writer of that book makes several references to Abel, Adam's second-born, who was killed unjustly by his own elder brother. Abel is listed in Hebrews 11 as the first member of the famous "Hall of Faith" found in that chapter. Hebrews 11:4 says this about Abel: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (KJV).

That phrase "he being dead yet speaketh" is a familiar one, but have you ever realized what it refers to? It is an allusion to Genesis 4:10, where God said to Cain, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." Though Abel was dead, he still spoke through his innocent blood, crying out for vengeance.

Those were figurative terms, of course. Abel's blood did not literally cry out. But the violent and unjust manner of his death—brutal murder at his own brother's wicked hand—fairly screamed for vengeance. Justice needed to be done. A crime had been committed for which severe punishment was in order. Abel's blood, spilled on the ground, was a testimony against Cain. In metaphorical terms, Abel's blood was crying for retribution against Cain.

Abel was the first martyr, and the blood of every martyr since then has joined the cry for justice against the persecutors of God's people. In that sense, they all still speak, though they are dead. They are the very ones pictured in Revelation 6:10, under the altar, calling for God to glorify Himself in the accomplishment of justice.

But Hebrews 12:24 makes an interesting contrast. There the writer mentions Jesus' blood, "which speaks better than the blood of Abel." The meaning is clear: whereas Abel's blood (and the blood of other martyrs) screams for vengeance, Christ's blood pleads for mercy.

Jesus' blood, shed as an atonement for sins, appeals for forgiveness on behalf of sinners. This is a remarkable truth. All the blood of all the martyrs of all time cries out for justice and vengeance and retribution. But Christ's blood "speaks better."

Again, there is nothing wrong with desiring justice. Justice honors God. It is certainly legitimate to want to see wrongs made right and evildoers recompensed for their wickedness. But the longing for forgiveness is better still. Christians are to be characterized by a desire for mercy, compassion, and forgiveness—even for their enemies.

How do we develop such a state of mind? How can a Christian, badly hurt by the offenses of another, learn to forgive "from [the] heart" the way Jesus commanded (Matthew 18:35)? What about the commands in Scripture to confront those who sin against us? How do we know when to confront and when to overlook an offense?



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Furthermore, how can we forgive those who have not repented? Doesn't God himself withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant? If we are to forgive in the same way we have been forgiven, don't we first need to require the repentance of the offender?

Those are all essential questions. Does the Bible offer answers? I believe it does. Let's begin by exploring what Scripture means when it commands us to forgive in the same way God forgives.

God's Forgiveness Versus Our Forgiveness

How can forgiveness between fellow sinners be compared to the forgiveness of an offended deity? There must be some similarities, because Scripture instructs us to forgive in the same manner as we have been forgiven. This idea is clearly stated in Scripture, *"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you"* (Ephesians 4:32; see Colossians 3:13).

Some take the position that this teaches forgiveness should always be conditional. Their rationale goes like this: God forgives only those who repent. Therefore, if we are going to forgive in the same manner as we have been forgiven, we should withhold forgiveness from all who are unrepentant.

There is some merit in this position. There are times when forgiveness must be conditional, and we will discuss that issue later in this series. But I must disagree with that position overall.

To make conditionality the gist of Christlike forgiving seems to miss the whole point of what Scripture is saying. When Scripture instructs us to forgive in the manner we have been forgiven, what is in view is not the idea of withholding forgiveness until the offender expresses repentance.

Listen carefully to what these verses are saying:

Matthew 6:12, 14–15: *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. . . . For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (KJV).

James 2:13: *"For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment."*

Matthew 18:35: *"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses"* (KJV).

Luke 6:36–38: *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."*



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The emphasis is on forgiving freely, generously, willingly, eagerly, speedily—and from the heart. The attitude of the forgiver is where the focus of Scripture lies, not the terms of forgiveness.

Most of those who hold that all forgiveness is conditional portray forgiveness as a formal transaction in which the forgiven one must repent and the offended party promises in return never to bring up the sin again. If this transaction has not occurred, they say, real forgiveness has not yet taken place. In some cases the offender may repent and ask forgiveness without prompting, and forgiveness should be granted on the spot. But in most cases, particularly when the offender is ignorant of having committed a wrong, the offended party must first confront the offender and formally solicit repentance before he or she can forgive. In short, no act of forgiveness can occur until the offender asks for forgiveness.

Sadly, I have seen people who hold this opinion become obsessive confronters and ultimately make themselves odious to friend and foe alike. Others nurse grudges, refuse to relinquish bitterness, and even sever friendships over relatively petty offenses, justifying such attitudes because they are convinced they have no duty to forgive until the offender repents.

While it is often true that forgiveness involves a two-way transaction, it is not true of all forgiveness. There are times when forgiveness should be unconditional and unilateral, and there are other times when forgiveness must be withheld until the offender repents. The biblical principles governing these different kinds of forgiveness are clear.

This kind of free, abundant forgiveness is how we imitate Christ's forgiveness of us. Yet, as I said before, there are times when conditional forgiveness is appropriate. ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*

The Tremendous Contribution of Women

God designed life to revolve around relationships, and within those relationships are differing roles. In our society, unfortunately, more emphasis is placed on individuality than on relationships. People seek to satisfy themselves and focus on their rights rather than on how they can best serve others. When men and women refuse to accept their God-ordained roles in the church, family, and community, they undermine the Lord's foundational design for those institutions and all the relationships involved.

Women are not inferior to men; they simply have a different role. Many people believe the only place of power and influence in society is in a leadership position, assuming it is more fulfilling to lead than to follow. But people in nonleadership roles can be very influential. Besides, a leader carries a heavy load of responsibility that is not always desirable (James 3:1).



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The Tremendous Contribution of Women

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The notion that the greatest experience in life is to be on top of the pile and controlling everything is an illusion. And it is women who suffer most from that misperception as the world pressures them to climb the ladder, forsaking God's design for them. Society, in turn, suffers from not receiving the benefit of a woman's best effort in her God-given role.

First Timothy 2:15 speaks somewhat cryptically of the influence women have by pursuing their strengths: *"But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint."* The context helps our understanding: **verse 14** speaks of women being in sin; **verse 15**, of women being saved. Paul was making a clever contrast.

"Preserved" is from *sōzō*, the common New Testament word for salvation. Paul obviously does not intend to teach that women are saved from sin *"through the bearing of children."* That would contradict the New Testament's teaching that salvation is by faith alone.

Paul taught that although a woman precipitated the Fall, women are preserved from that stigma through childbearing. A woman led the human race into sin, yet women benefit humankind by replenishing it. Beyond that, they have the opportunity to lead the race to godliness through their influence on their children. Far from being second-class citizens, women have the primary responsibility for training their children in godliness.

A mother's virtue has a profound impact on the life of her children. Mothers usually spend far more time with their children than do their fathers and thus have the greater influence. For women to fulfill their calling to raise children in godliness, they must *"continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint"* (1 Timothy 2:15). To raise godly children, a woman must be godly herself.

Obviously God doesn't want all women to be mothers. Some He doesn't even want married—He has given them the gift of singleness (1 Corinthians 7). Others He allows to be childless for His own purposes. But as a general rule, motherhood is the greatest contribution a woman can make to the human race. The pain of childbearing was the punishment for the first sin, but the bearing of children delivers women from the stigma of that sin.

A woman also has influence in the church by utilizing her spiritual gifts. The Bible teaches that each Christian, at the moment of salvation, receives complementary spiritual gifts from God that enable the church to function smoothly (Romans 12:3–14; 1 Corinthians 12:4–30; Ephesians 4:1–13). The gifts come in two categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts (1 Peter 4:10–11). Those gifted in speaking excel in one or more of the following: teaching, wisdom (giving practical advice), knowledge (imparting scholarly information), exhortation, and leadership. Those gifted in serving have one or more of these strengths: showing mercy, having strong faith (especially manifested in prayer), giving (meeting needs), discerning truth from error, helping (doing basic essentials), and administering or organizing.



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Spiritual gifts—as opposed to church offices—are not gender defined in Scripture. An important challenge for men in church leadership is to encourage and provide opportunities for both men and women to minister to the Body of Christ in ways that genuinely employ their spiritual gifts, whether speaking or serving.

God does see fit to gift some women with leadership and teaching abilities. They can and do use those gifts in situations apart from the worship service of the church—a women's Bible study, fellowship group, prayer meeting, or class situation, for example. There's plenty of opportunity for women to exercise their gifts and other abilities in a manner consistent with God's design.

Our text in 1 Timothy 2, far from being an insult to a woman's intelligence, instead provides practical direction on how she can best apply her skills. And one of those skills may be teaching.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul taught women to accept their God-given roles. They must not seek the leadership role in the church. How tragic that so many women feel their lives are unfulfilled because they can't function in the same role as men! Women can have a great impact through raising godly children and exercising their spiritual gifts. If a woman is godly and if God chooses to give her children whom she raises in the "*discipline and instruction of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4), she will have a profound influence on a new generation. Men have the outward, overt leadership by God's design, but women can have just as great an influence indirectly.

God has designed male and female roles with perfect wisdom. Men are to provide loving leadership, but they can't lead alone. They need powerful support, and God has designed women to provide it. Of course, not all men will take prominent leadership positions, and many women will lead in some way. But when men and women work together in their God-given roles, they promote unity and growth in the Body of Christ. When each believer pursues what the Lord has created and gifted him or her to do, the church reflects the character of God and offers a preview of heaven to the watching world. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

Children Are Not Looking for Perfect Parents

Though children learn from what we say, they learn even more from who we are and what we do. Our faith, our praying, our teaching, and our living must be parts of a seamless whole. Thus, the implementation of our teaching as parent-prophets necessitates godly modeling.

The preeminent godly model for us as parent-prophets is the Lord Jesus, who excelled all others as a true prophet, teacher, fisher of men, and maker of disciples. We do well to make a personal study of the Gospels with an eye to how Christ went about training His disciples. A good teacher looks for good models and constantly strives to hone his skills and improve his methods. Christ provides us with the very best model and abundant resources to draw upon as we take up the work of teaching and training our children.



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Children Are Not Looking for Perfect Parents

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Children are not looking for perfect parents, and they are remarkably forgiving. They have an uncanny way of knowing who their parents are and what they stand for. It is hard to keep secrets from anyone when we live under the same roof. Children are always reading the books of our lives. Besides the Bible, the way we live our faith from day to day is the most important book our children will ever read.

What children need to see is not a perfect mom or dad, and certainly not a mom or dad who never says, *"I'm sorry."* They need to see in us an unwavering commitment to Jesus Christ, an unconditional love for them, and a strong bond of love for each other as husband and wife. They need to see a mom and dad laboring shoulder to shoulder, of whom the children can say: *"My mom and dad hate sin, they love God, and their only hope is in Christ Jesus. They want with all that is within them to live holy and godly lives. I can see it, I can feel it; I know it is true and it is real, and I want to be like them. I want the God of my father and mother to be my God."* In particular, godly modeling should instill in our children the conviction that the Christian life is the way to live and that it brings true joy, true purpose, and true meaning in life, and awaken in them a kind of holy jealousy to want these things for themselves. As our children read the books of our lives, they learn how important God, Christ, the Bible, faith, prayer, and family worship are to us. ~ **Dr. Joel R. Beeke**

When the World Seems to Be Winning

How should we respond when we feel as though wickedness in the world and compromise in the church are prevailing over the kingdom of God? In Matthew 13:24–43, Jesus teaches on the nature of the kingdom of God—or, as Matthew more characteristically says, *"the kingdom of heaven."* He does so by presenting three parables to help us understand how this kingdom grows: the parable of the weeds, the parable of the mustard seed, and the parable of the leaven. And as we will see, these truths about how the kingdom grows provide encouragement and perspective to the people of God in difficult days.

Christ's Teaching About the Kingdom

The subject of the kingdom is significant in the teaching and work of our Lord. In fact, the first statement of His public ministry was, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 4:17). In saying this, Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom was at hand because the King had come. It is the King who brings the kingdom and rules over the kingdom, and it is the King who reminds us of the blessing we find in the kingdom.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus twice speaks about the kingdom: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,"* and *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3, 10). In these passages, Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom for the afflicted, for the struggling, and for the weak. He comes to the people with encouragement, bringing a word of blessing to those who are struggling: *"The kingdom is coming."*



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Throughout His ministry, Jesus returns to the subject of the kingdom from different angles and in different ways. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He instructed them to pray for the kingdom: “*Your kingdom come*” (Matthew 6:10). He also issued a warning about the kingdom: “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 7:21). In the Sermon on the Mount, He taught, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus also told His disciples, “*To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 13:11). This means that the reality of the kingdom of heaven is not immediately obvious to everyone. We must be taught about it. We must be led into it. These truths about the kingdom must be revealed to us, and in these three parables in Matthew 13, Jesus tells us about this kingdom and how it grows.

As Christians, we long to see the Word of God and the truth of Christ spread. We often think about how we can serve the Lord, how we make Him known, and how we can be effective in proclaiming His Word to the world. As we consider these questions, we would do well to recognize the point of these parables. In them, Jesus teaches that the kingdom does not grow in exactly the way we might think it should grow.

We’ve all likely had an experience in our lives where we’ve thought, “Why is the Lord doing things this way?” We’re too pious to say it out loud, but we might even secretly think, “I would’ve had a better plan.” That is precisely the situation that Jesus addresses in these parables.

A Deliberate Mess of Wheat and Weeds

In Matthew 13:27, the servants ask the master: “*Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?*” The master in this parable represents Jesus, who is in charge of everything. What He wants to happen will happen. He has all power and authority, and He has sown good seed, His Word. This parable comes just after the parable of the sower, so the ideas of seed, sowing, and fruit are on Jesus’ mind. The question comes from the servants: “*If you, the powerful master, have sown good seed, why do we see weeds coming up?*”

There is an implicit criticism in the servants’ question. It’s as if they are saying: “*You could have done better than this. Did you get the seed on sale? Is it a mixture of good seed and bad seed? It’s obvious when we look at the field that we don’t see beautiful, straight rows of wheat growing. Instead, we see wheat and weeds growing together. It’s a mess.*”

I suspect that we all—in various ways and at various times—see life as a mess: Why is it going the way it’s going? Why couldn’t it be simpler? Why couldn’t it be better? If Jesus is in charge, why aren’t things more obviously successful in the advance of His kingdom? That’s the real crux of the issue. However, what the servants see as a mess is not a mess according to Jesus.



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If you were to walk into my office, you'd think it was a mess. My wife will hardly look through the door. She just shakes her head and says, "How can you get anything done in that mess?" I answer: "I know what's in every pile. It's not my fault that there aren't enough places on the shelves for books so that they have to be piled up all around. I grant that it's a mess, but it's an unintentional mess."

By contrast, Jesus is saying here that the mess of this world is not unintentional; the mess of this world is deliberate. The evil one is opposing the advancement of God's kingdom. There is a deliberate effort to undermine and subvert the growth of His kingdom. The enemy sowed weeds in the field when we weren't watching, and we need to understand this reality. We face a spiritual battle in which the work of Christ is being opposed by the evil one. It is a mess. It is a struggle. But we shouldn't be surprised. Jesus knew that this would happen. He knew there would be opposition.

When we look at the life of our Savior on the surface, we might say that His life was a mess. He faced great opposition. He apparently failed in His mission because He was arrested and executed. But Jesus is saying in these parables, "I am accomplishing My purpose."

Christ's Strategy for the Weeds

The servants, seeing the weeds among the wheat, come up with what seems like a good strategy: "*Do you want us to go and gather them?*" (Matthew 13:28). They ask whether they should go and pull out the weeds. After all, why not remove them while they're still small? Why not help the wheat grow more effectively by removing the weeds?

One of the most difficult parts of child rearing, in my opinion, was taking my children out on Saturday mornings to pull weeds in the yard. They would come up with various tactics to try to evade that labor. It was good to see their strategic thinking, even though they employed that thinking to devise reasons to go back into the house for one thing after another. Similarly, the servants in this parable seek to employ strategic thinking to remove the weeds, reasoning: "Why shouldn't the weeds be pulled up now? Why shouldn't Jesus be in charge now?"

Throughout the history of the church, there have been those who wanted to advance the kingdom of Christ by taking dramatic action to suppress unbelief and untruth. Christians can sometimes be tempted to use coercion where they should use persuasion. At various times, the church has tried to force the advance of Christianity by using legal means to suppress unbelief, heresy, and false religion. By contrast, our Savior always gives us the example of being persuasive in helping people to see the truth.

Through this parable, Jesus tells us that this is not the time to pull up the weeds. It is dangerous to pull up the weeds because one must go tramping through the fields to do so, and some of the wheat can get stepped on in the process. When this happens, Christians unintentionally end up doing the evil one's work: instead of helping the wheat to grow, they trample the wheat. Instead, Jesus' advice is to let the weeds grow side by side with the wheat, and it will one day become clear that the wheat is different from the weeds. The day will come when the harvest is ready. When the harvest is gathered, then the separation of the weeds from the wheat can take place.



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Thus, the growth of the kingdom, according to Jesus, happens in a mixed, messy, distressed world. And Jesus, in effect, says to us: “Don’t worry too much about it. I know what I’m doing. The good news is that the wheat will grow.”

A Call to Faithfulness in the Mess

In Matthew 13:35, Matthew quotes from the Old Testament to explain why Jesus spoke in parables. He quotes Psalm 78:2 specifically, saying:

*I will open my mouth in parables;
I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.*

Psalm 78 is one of the longer psalms in the Psalter, and it is about the history of Israel. Matthew’s quotation from the beginning of this psalm essentially communicates that the history of Israel is, in its own way, a parable. It is a story that illustrates something. Parables can consist of fictional stories, such as the story of the wheat and the weeds, or they can draw from a real historical story, as we find in Psalm 78 with the history of Israel. The point is that we derive a lesson from these stories that helps us understand truth.

Psalm 78 shows a repeated pattern in the life of God’s people. **First**, God gives blessing to His people. But then they become forgetful, negligent, and disobedient. As a result, God sends judgment on His people. When they repent, He sends His blessing, and the pattern begins again: His people become forgetful, leading to judgment, and so on. This pattern seems to take place not just in the history of Israel but also in the history of the church. When the church enjoys a time of great blessing, success, and growth, it often becomes negligent, disobedient, and presumptuous. As a result, the Lord sends some kind of judgment on His people that leads them back to repentance.

The appeal to Psalm 78 in this context of the parable of the weeds powerfully reminds the church that though the growth of the kingdom appears to be a mess, we are not to contribute to the mess because “*the good seed is the sons of the kingdom*” (Matthew 13:38). The good seed represents the people whom God is saving. The people of the good seed will embrace the righteousness of the kingdom. They will seek to know and live according to the will of God. That is Jesus’ point. He is calling us to live within this mess and yet be found faithful. Even more, He gives us a reason not to be discouraged.

The Way the Kingdom Grows

It is interesting that while Jesus explains the meaning of the parable of the wheat and the weeds in great detail, He doesn’t explain the parable of the mustard seed or the parable of the leaven. I think that this is the case because their meaning is rather obvious. In them, He makes two points.



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First, in the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus makes the point that even though the weeds and the wheat grow up together, even though the kingdom grows in a mixed world, we must remember that the kingdom grows. It starts as a tiny seed and eventually grows into a tree in which birds can plant their nests. Yes, weeds are growing, but don't miss the fact that the kingdom is growing too. This kingdom started off small, in an obscure, unimportant place from the world's perspective. Galilee wasn't even the center of Israel, yet now the kingdom has grown so large that its branches stretch all over the world. The kingdom is growing from small to large.

Second, in the parable of the leaven, we see that the kingdom grows out. When making bread, only a little leaven must be added to the lump. It starts as a partial presence but becomes pervasive. The point here is not so much that it grows big but that it grows out; it permeates whatever surrounds it. That is not to say that everything becomes the kingdom, but rather that the kingdom grows everywhere. This is part of the excitement of the time in which we live. We have technological abilities to reach places that we would've thought completely unreachable previously. The leaven of the kingdom is reaching places that surprise us. And while we may be amazed, Jesus anticipated it.

In both parables, Jesus is saying: "In the midst of the mess, don't fail to see the success. I'm accomplishing My purpose." What is the great purpose of Jesus? Not one of His elect will be lost. He will gather all the sons and daughters of the kingdom into His Father's house. That is an encouragement to us.

The Kingdom Will Shine Forth

When Jesus explains the parable of the weeds, He seals His teaching with a promise: though we live in a day of mixed growth as the kingdom slowly grows from small to large and slowly becomes pervasive, the day is coming when that growth will be complete. The day is coming when there will be a harvest. The day is coming when this process of growth will reach its end, and the kingdom will shine forth in its perfection. While the kingdom grows, we mustn't lose heart. Instead, we must focus on that promise.

There will be a judgment at the end. That's why the task to which Christ has called us is so serious. Jesus speaks more about hell than anyone else in the Scriptures. He's serious about what is coming. He wants people to know that life is not to be taken lightly, that there will be a judgment, and that those who do not stand in the judgment will experience weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's a terrible picture. But the encouragement is that in the day of harvest, the children of God will shine forth. As Jesus says, "*The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (Matthew 13:43).

This promise should encourage us when we see the mess, when we have trouble seeing the success, when we see a world that seems so resistant and indifferent. The day is coming when the kingdom will shine forth and the sons and daughters of the kingdom will be moved from obscurity to glory. What was once small becomes large, what was once mixed becomes pure, what was once partial becomes pervasive, and most importantly, what was once evil becomes righteous and will shine in the glory of the Father's kingdom.



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Jesus points us to the Father in this process of the kingdom's growth. No matter how messy it appears, let us never forget that it is our loving heavenly Father who is in charge. He is concerned about our well-being and will accomplish His purposes for our ultimate good.

Christ is growing His kingdom. He's using strategies that may surprise us, but He will accomplish His purpose so that we will shine forth as righteous in our Father's kingdom. ~ ***Dr. W. Robert Godfrey is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow and chairman of Ligonier Ministries. He is president emeritus and professor emeritus of church history at Westminster Seminary California.***

Responding to God's Call

We live in daily submission to a host of authorities who circumscribe our freedom: from parents to traffic police officers to dog catchers. All authorities are to be respected and, as the Bible declares, honored. But only one authority has the intrinsic right to bind the conscience. God alone imposes absolute obligation, and He does it by the power of His holy voice.

He calls the world into existence by divine imperative, by holy fiat. He calls the dead and rotting Lazarus to life again. He calls people who were no people "My people." He calls us out of darkness and into light. He effectually calls us to redemption. He calls us to service.

Our vocation is so named because of its Latin root *vocatio*, "a calling." The term vocational choice is a contradiction in terms to the Christian. To be sure, we do choose it and can, in fact, choose to disobey it. But prior to the choice and hovering with absolute power over it is the divine summons, the imposition to duty from which we dare not flee.

It was vocation that drove Jonah on his flight to Tarshish and caused his terrified shipmates to dump him in the sea to still the vengeful tempest. It was vocation that elicited the anguished cry from Paul, "*Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel*" (1 Corinthians 9:16). It was vocation that put a heinous cup of bitterness in the hands of Jesus.

The call of God is not always to a glamorous vocation, and its fruit in this world is often bittersweet. Yet God calls us according to our gifts and talents, and directs us to paths of the most useful service to His kingdom. How impoverished we would be if Jonah had made it to Tarshish, if Paul had refused to preach, if Jeremiah really had turned in his prophet's card, or if Jesus had politely declined the cup. ~ ***Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.***

Coram Deo

Think about it . . . what will be the tab of spiritual losses if you do not respond to God's call?



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in June 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 June 2025

Birthdays

*Gene A. (6)
Ethan M. (27)*

Mike P. (27)

Anniversaries

*Brian and Muriel R. (7)
Zach and Corrisa A. (16)*

*Ben and Carrie P. (23)
Scott and Ruth T. (25)*

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus **Luke 9:23–27**

²³ And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” ~ *ESV*



West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership

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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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