

West Suffolk Baptist Church

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant



West Suffolk Epistle



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Christ's Command to be Compassionate

Divine compassion has human implications. Because God is compassionate, He expects His people to be as well. The mercy He has extended to sinners like us should motivate us to be similarly compassionate with others. In fact, Christ commanded us to be compassionate.

Showing mercy to the weak and infirm is the duty of every Christian. In Luke's gospel, Jesus gave us a direct instruction that stands as a mandate not only for the church but for each individual believer. He said:

When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed, since they do not have means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. (Luke 14:12-14)

Could that possibly be more clear? I don't see how.

Jesus is saying that if you are hosting a celebration or a feast, you shouldn't invite only those who can pay you back by giving you a reciprocal invitation. Invite people who have no capacity to pay you back in any way. If you want to manifest the love and compassion of God, that is the way to do it. True Christlike generosity means showing kindness that can never be repaid.

When you are lavish in giving to someone you know will be bountiful in return, that is not the generosity of God; that is the typical, shallow altruism of human self-interest. Only when you are generous to those who are powerless to reciprocate are you truly showing the generosity of God. And if you really want to enter into the joy of God, there is no better way.

That is a solemn command from Christ. It is a practical mandate that should characterize our relationships with others on a personal level, in the context of our families, and especially in our fellowship with other believers. Let that be the spirit that permeates our dealings with our neighbors.

Now put that command together with everything we have seen about the steadfast love of God; the redemptive purpose of God in showing compassion; the profuse generosity David displayed to Mephibosheth (II Samuel 9); and (above all) Christ as the ultimate expression of divine compassion, who literally took our weakness and infirmities as His own in order to identify with us.

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If all those things illustrate the kind of compassion we're supposed to show to the weak and disabled in our communities, it seems shockingly, uncomfortably obvious that we as believers in Christ—both collectively and individually—need to do more than we are currently doing to reach out and minister to people in our culture who are disabled, weak, blind, poor, and living in distress. They are often overlooked by the rest of society. They must not be neglected by the church.

The church was not established as a country club or a fraternity house for fit, cool, and stylish people. It is a fellowship of those who recognize their own fallenness and utter helplessness, who have laid hold of Christ for salvation, and whose main business on earth is showing other needy sinners the way of salvation. If we neglect to reach out especially to those who are blind, infirm, or otherwise disabled, then we are simply not being faithful heralds of the tender mercy of Christ. ~ *Dr. John F. MacArthur, Jr.*

Is Human Nature Basically Good or Completely Sinful?

The idea that people are basically good by nature echoes the ancient Pelagian heresy, which affirmed that Adam's sin affected Adam alone. According to this view, human nature was not affected by Adam's fall. Scripture teaches otherwise, asserting that Adam's sin affected all his natural-born posterity (Romans 5:12–14). By nature, human beings are “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). This is the theological point behind the phrase total depravity—the T in TULIP. In other words, sin has corrupted all of us (except Jesus) in heart, mind, body, and soul. This doctrine is found throughout both the Old and New Testaments (Genesis 6:5; Psalms 14:1–3; 143:2; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Isaiah 64:6; Mark 7:18–23; Romans 1:21–32; 3:10–18, 23; 8:5–8; Galatians 4:3; Ephesians 2:1–3; 4:17–19; Titus 3:3).

Christians can become confused because Scripture teaches that human beings were created by God in His image (Genesis 1:26–27), and God calls all that He created good (v. 31). If everything that God created is good, and if God created human nature, then isn't human nature necessarily good? Yes. As originally created, human nature was good. However, part of human nature is the human will. The first human beings had the responsibility to align their created wills perfectly with God's will—to obey Him. Instead, they disobeyed God. Like Satan, they turned their will, as it were, perpendicular to God's will, introducing sin and misery into the world and into their own natures. In other words, they sinned. When they did this, human nature was distorted and corrupted. Like begets like, and all humans are now born with a corrupted and fallen human nature. Human beings are now born slaves to sin.

This is why the claim that “everyone sins a little” is also incorrect. We tend to measure ourselves against other human beings, and we like to pick the absolute worst specimens for comparison. We like to compare ourselves to people like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, or Mao Zedong. It's easy to feel good about ourselves if the standard is refraining from killing millions of people. But this is not the standard by which the Word of God measures sin. The standard is God's will, and the requirement is perfect obedience to that will. “*Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it*” (James 2:10; see Galatians 3:10).

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Is Human Nature Basically Good or Completely Sinful?

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The question is not, Did you refrain from murdering millions today? The question is, Did you perfectly “*love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*” today, and did you perfectly love “*your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:37–39)? How often did you fail to do this perfectly? Was it just “a little”? No. We fail to do this a lot, and that means we sin a lot. This is why we need the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. He is the only One who has ever perfectly fulfilled the law. ~ **Ligonier Editorial**

Is It OK to Argue?

The answer depends on what “argue” means. The Bible is clear that some types of arguing are sin. For example, the Bible instructs Christians to use “sweetness” in their speech (Proverbs 16:21) and to not be quarrelsome (2 Timothy 2:23). The Bible also condemns arguing about things that are not worth arguing about, a type of arguing that the Bible sometimes labels “*foolish controversies*” (1 Timothy 6:4; Titus 3:9). Additionally, the Bible condemns ungodly anger, the type of anger that sometimes leads us to engage in unbiblical arguments (James 1:20).

But there is also a biblical way of arguing. Jesus often engaged in arguments to challenge His opponents with the truth of God’s Word. Also, Paul frequently argued with others for the truthfulness of the gospel and for the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 17:1–9, 22–34). Peter encourages his readers to always be ready to defend their faith, and that often requires making arguments (1 Peter 3:15). Pastors are also called to defend orthodox doctrine that may sometimes include godly arguing (Titus 1:9). Argumentation that seeks to challenge falsehood with the truth of God’s Word is called apologetics, and it is biblical and commended as a practice for every Christian.

In the end, answering two questions can help us determine whether it is OK to argue. **First**, are we arguing with a heart of humility or are we being contentious? **Second**, are we arguing for God’s glory and God’s truth or for some other reason? To argue in humility for God’s glory according to God’s truth is to argue in a biblical way. ~ **Ligonier Editorial**

The Problem of Delaying Marriage

Adulthood is not just a function of age—it is an achievement. Throughout human history, young people have aspired to achieve adulthood and have worked hard to get there. The three nearly universal marks of adulthood in human societies include marriage, financial independence, and readiness for parenthood. Now, the very concept of adulthood is in jeopardy.

Study after study reveals that young Americans are achieving adulthood, if at all, far later than previous generations now living. The average age of marriage for young Americans fifty years ago was in the very early twenties. Now, it is trending closer to age thirty.

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Why is this important to us all? A stable and functional culture requires the establishment of stable marriages and the nurturing of families. Without a healthy marriage and family life as foundation, no lasting and healthy community can long survive.

Clearly, our own society reveals the delay of marriage and its consequences, but we are hardly alone. Many European nations display similar patterns of delayed adulthood, with ominous economic, political, and social implications.

For Christians, however, the issue is never merely sociological or economic. The primary issue is moral. When most of us think about morality, we think first of ethical rules and commandments, but the Christian worldview reminds us that the first moral concern is always what the Creator expects of us as His human creatures, the only creatures made in His own image.

The Bible affirms the concept of marriage as a central expectation for humanity. As early as the second chapter in the Bible we read: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24).

Now, that reality is becoming more and more rare. In the larger society, cohabitation without marriage is increasingly the norm, but even secular observers note that cohabitation no longer even leads to marriage in most cases. Andrew Cherlin of John Hopkins University recently told Time magazine that most cohabiting relationships among young people in the United States are short term. This is not cohabiting before marriage; it is cohabiting instead of marriage. The Time story also pointed to another worrying pattern: millennials are having children outside of marriage at astounding rates.

Furthermore, several years ago, W. Bradford Wilcox, relying on research conducted by Robert Wuthnow, argued that the delay of marriage is a primary driver of secularization. This goes hand in hand with the fact that the extension of adolescence comes with vast and often unnoticed effects. Adulthood is meant for adult responsibilities, and for the vast majority of young people, that will mean marriage and parenthood. The extension of adolescence into the twenties (and even the thirties) is highly correlated with the rise of secularism and with lower rates of church attendance.

Christians understand that we were created as male and female to demonstrate the glory of God, and that we were given the gift of marriage as the singular context for which God designed the sexual gift and granted us the privilege and command of having and raising children. For all these reasons and more, Christians must understand that, unless given the calling of celibacy, Christians should honor marriage and seek to marry and to move into parenting and the full responsibilities of adulthood earlier rather than later in life.

Delaying adulthood is not consistent with a biblical vision of life, and for most young Christians, marriage should be a central part of planning for young adulthood and faithfulness to Christ. As husband and wife achieving adulthood together, young Christians serve as a witness of God's plan and God's gift before a confused world.

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Christians understand that sex before and outside of marriage is simply not an option. Cohabiting is inconsistent with obedience to Christ. Children are God's gifts to be received and welcomed within the marriage covenant.

Tellingly, secular authorities in the culture are now expressing worry about the delay of marriage among young Americans. When Time magazine is concerned about young Americans not getting married, Christians must be doubly concerned.

Young Americans, and that includes young Christians, face some very real challenges in moving toward full adulthood, and there is no question that economic factors play a part. But even secular observers understand that a shift in marriage points to an underlying shift in morality. The blunt fact is that previous generations of young adults, facing even greater economic challenges, still found their way to adulthood and marriage.

The Christian church must encourage young Christians toward the goal of marriage and must be clear about the necessity of holiness and obedience to Christ at every stage and in every season of life. When the world around us is scratching its head, asking what has happened to marriage, Christians must display the glory of God in marriage and all that God gives to us in the marital covenant.

And we must encourage young Christians not to delay marriage, nor to marry in haste, but to make marriage a priority in the critical years of young adulthood. In that cause, we have no time to wait. ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. - President and Centennial Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.**

The Altar of Cynicism

People lose their souls to many gods. There are the popular gods like money, sex, and power. But there is one unusual god to which men lose their souls, and maybe that god has seduced more people than any of the more famous or obvious gods that live in our hearts.

Cynicism is the god of the thinking person. Cynicism at first sight is not attractive, and thus, it does not seem seductive or powerful.

It was the god with whom Solomon battled from the beginning of Ecclesiastes to the end. Oh, he spoke of living for money, sex, and power, but what did he conclude? He concluded that they were void of meaning. They were carafes that looked like they were filled with wine, but they contained only colored water. Solomon surveyed all the gods. In fact, he was intimate with each of them. But the one that came the nearest to owning his soul was cynicism. He looked at everything — his money, his power, his work, his brilliance, even his relationships with his wives and friends.

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He concluded that all of these were useless. There was nothing or no one who delivered what they seemed to promise. These gods that he had loved with all his might went back on their word; they double-crossed his soul. Thus: *“Vanity of vanities...all is vanity”* (Ecclesiastes 12:8). The Hebrew word translated vanity means empty, transitory, unsatisfactory. His gods were empty and could not satisfy. They could not be trusted.

Last year I read a very powerful book in which the protagonist had everything (money, power, prestige, family, sex), but he “woke up” to discover how empty his life was. So he set out to find a reality that could be trusted. Along the way his wife, parents, and friends all proved unfaithful and untrustworthy. In the end, he sailed out of the harbor into the ocean alone on his boat with no direction. He had lost his soul to cynicism. Every god, every man, every woman, every institution he trusted let him down. But then he, too, had proved to be unfaithful and untrustworthy, because like all of us he had lied, he had failed to deliver when others trusted him. He, himself, had not been faithful. In the end he became cynical. He kept saying, *“To hell with it, to hell with it all.”*

This is where cynicism takes hold: with our realization that nothing or no one can be totally trusted, and we can’t even point the finger of accusation at others because we ourselves cannot be trusted. We must number ourselves among the unfaithful and untrustworthy. Cynicism is the temple to which we finally come after stopovers at the houses of all the other gods. It is the temple at the end of *“temple row.”*

At the last, Solomon was saved from his cynicism. Ecclesiastes did not end like the book I read. Solomon did not sail out of the harbor into an endless ocean of emptiness. He did not end his story with the words, *“To hell with it, to hell with it all.”* He came to the sanctuary of a changeless God — a God who made incredible promises of grace and then kept His word. He came to a God who forgave unfaithful and untrustworthy people. He came to a God who said, *“I will be faithful to my covenant with you. I will be faithful even though you have not been faithful to Me.”*

Don’t expect more from your deities than they are able to deliver. Money will fail you, pleasure will fail you, power will fail you; friends, wives, husbands, fathers, mothers, and children will fail you. Solomon was right about that. And when they do, many of us are devastated. In our bitterness and resentment we go to the temple of cynicism. But there is a gospel for cynics. There is a gospel that says to us, *“Of course, all of these will fail you. Of course, they are unfaithful and untrustworthy, and so are you.”* So, in the words of Solomon, let’s hear *“the conclusion of the matter.”*

Don’t give up; there is one more temple. It is the temple that welcomes the unfaithful and untrustworthy. Above the door are words of grace: *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?”* (Isaiah 55:1–2).

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The cynic comes to this temple and finally finds One who will not betray him and who will never fail him. This God has declared that the sun and moon will fall from the sky before His word and promises can be broken. He went to the extreme of sacrificing His own Son to keep His promise, to be faithful to His oath of justice. He has never lied. He has never broken His word. Here is One who is trustworthy. And surprisingly, He has invited the unfaithful and untrustworthy to come and live with Him. The way His creation treated Him, we would expect Him to be cynical. Yet, He speaks grace to the very people who failed Him. Former cynics no longer go about every day saying, “*Vanity of vanities...everything is vanity.*” They are singing a new song, one about an amazing grace that saves wretches.

And now a very strange thing has happened. These former cynics now give the grace they received to those who have been unfaithful and untrustworthy to them. ~ **Reverend John P. Sartelle Sr.**—*Senior pastor at Christ Covenant Reformed Church in Memphis, Tenn.*

What Is Thanksgiving Day?

The First Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is an American holiday that stretches all the way back to a time long before America became a nation. The Pilgrims landed in 1620. They faced brutal conditions and were woefully unprepared. Roughly half of them died in that first year. Then they had a successful harvest of corn. In November of 1621 they decided to celebrate a feast of thanksgiving.

Edward Winslow was among those who ate that first thanksgiving meal in 1621. He noted:

Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we gathered the fruit of our labors. . . . And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want.

In addition to the fowl eaten that first Thanksgiving, the American Indians also brought along five deer as their contribution to the feast. Presumably they also ate corn.

Over the centuries, Americans continued to celebrate feasts of thanksgiving in the fall. Some presidents issued proclamations. Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation for a perpetual national holiday set aside for thanksgiving. In 1863, with the nation torn apart by the Civil War, he declared:

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I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.

Ingratitude

So we have a holiday of thanksgiving born in and further nurtured during times of great adversity and struggle. We might think that times of adversity and challenge would spawn ingratitude, while times of prosperity would spawn gratitude. Sadly, the reverse is true. A chilling scene from the animated television show *The Simpsons* demonstrates this. Bart Simpson was called upon to pray for a meal, to which he promptly prayed, *“Dear God, We paid for all of this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing.”*

Prosperity breeds ingratitude. The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism knew this. Question 28 asks what it benefits us to know that God creates and sustains all things. The answer is it gives patience in adversity and gratitude in prosperity. Moses also knew this. In Deuteronomy, he looks ahead to times of material prosperity for Israel, then sternly warns, inspired by the Holy Spirit, not to forget God. *“Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth’ ”* (Deuteronomy 8:17). We did this all ourselves. Thanks for nothing. Human nature trends toward ingratitude.

Another culprit breeding ingratitude is our entitlement culture. Simply put, why should we be grateful for what we deserve and what we have a right to? I was owed this, goes the culture, therefore why would I say thank you?

To Whom Are We Grateful?

A third culprit concerns what UC Davis professor of psychology Dr. Robert Emmons calls the “to whom” question. In his scientific study of gratitude, Emmons came to the realization that gratitude raises a singular and significant question: When we say thank you, to whom are we grateful?

The interesting thing here is that if we trace this “to whom” line of questioning back, like pulling on the threads of some tapestry, we find a singular answer at the end of each and every thread. The answer is God. To whom are we grateful? We are grateful in an ultimate sense to God.

Our Benefactor does *“good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness”* (Acts 14:17). Theologians call this common grace. God as creator cares for all His creation and provides for our needs. He gives us our very lives and our very breath.

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Our Benefactor also does good by giving His most precious gift, the gift of His Beloved Son. Theologians call this saving grace. Gifts often cost the giver. What a costly gift the Father has given us in sending the Son. So Paul exclaims, “*Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift*” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

The Necessity of Thanksgiving

When we consider God as the “to whom” we are thankful, we may well be seeing both the necessity of thanksgiving and the eclipse of thanksgiving. As culture veers more and more towards a secular state it shrinks back from gratitude. So vainly we think we did this all ourselves. So wrongly we think we deserve, or even have a fundamental right to, all of this. We also know what is at the end of the string if we pull on it long enough. We know that we will be confronted with a Creator. We know we will be accountable to a Creator. Saying thank you means we are dependent, not independent. We would rather be ungrateful. Paul says we know God from all the evidence He has left of Himself, but we don't want to “*honor him or give thanks to him*” (Romans 1:21). Then the downward spiral begins. A culture of ingratitude careens ever downward into decline.

We should not be counted among those who see the fourth Thursday in November as nothing more than a day of football and over-indulgence. We should be thankful for one day set apart to consider all that we have and realize that all that we have has been given to us. Of course, such gratitude should in no way be limited to one day out of 365.

Having been imprisoned for one year, four months, and eighteen days in a Nazi cell measuring 6 ft. x 9 ft, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote what is certainly a reminder of the meaning of the Thanksgiving holiday:

You must never doubt that I'm traveling with gratitude and cheerfulness along the road where I'm being led. My past life is brim-full of God's goodness, and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified. I'm so thankful for the people I have met, and I only hope that they never have to grieve about me, but that they, too, will always be certain of and thankful for God's mercy and forgiveness.

This article was written by Dr. Stephen J. Nichols - President of Reformation Bible College, Chief Academic Officer for Ligonier Ministries, and a Ligonier Ministries Teaching Fellow

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If you have a birthday or anniversary in November 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 November 2025

Birthdays

*Conley L. (1)
Diana K. (3)
April F. (5)
LeAnn M. (10)*

*Audrey D. (11)
Luke P. (15)
Malcolm H. (19)
Walt L. (20)*

*Althea Marie F. (21)
Nicole P. (28)*

Anniversaries

*Gene and Brenda A. (22)
Marlin and Sadie H. (22)*

Upcoming Events

November 23rd - 6 PM Evening Service - Annual Thanksgiving Testimony Service

November 30th - 6 PM Evening Service - Ask the Elders in a Q&A Session any Theological/Practical Questions



***West Suffolk Baptist
Church
Leadership***

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