

# West Suffolk Baptist Church

## Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant



# West Suffolk Epistle



Volume 13 Issue 2

February 2026

### ***The Attack on God's Design***

On the cover of the December 4, 1989 issue of Time magazine declared, "Women Face the '90s: In the '80s they tried to have it all. Now they've just plain had it. Is there a future for feminism?" In the cover article the author, Claudia Wallis, asked, "Is the feminist movement—one of the great social revolutions of contemporary history—truly dead? Or is it merely stalled and in need of a little consciousness raising?" Wallis claims it isn't dead, just in transition.

Faced with a myriad of setbacks in the 1980s, including the defeat of the equal rights amendment, the more radical elements of the women's movement lost their voice and others were forced to moderate their position. Even Betty Friedan, the movement's leading advocate, was pressured to declare herself in favor of the nuclear family.

While the extremists of the movement and their more outlandish positions—such as the abolition of marriage and the exaltation of lesbianism—no longer command the attention they once did; the damage to our society has been done. George Gilder, author of Men and Marriage (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1986) writes,

*Though rejecting feminist politics and lesbian posturing, American culture has absorbed the underlying ideology like a sponge. The principle tenets of sexual liberation or sexual liberalism—the obsolescence of masculinity and femininity, of sex roles, and of heterosexual monogamy as the moral norm—have diffused through the system and become part of America's conventional wisdom. Taught in most of the nation's schools and colleges and proclaimed insistently in the media, sexual liberalism prevails even where feminism—at least in its anti-male rhetoric—seems increasingly irrelevant.*

Unfortunately, the church is in the process of soaking up some of the same ideology. More and more undiscerning believers are falling prey to the feminist agenda. I am amazed at how many evangelical churches, schools, and even seminaries are jettisoning doctrines they once defended as biblical truths. Within evangelical Christianity there is an organizational counterpart to the feminist movement called *Christians for Biblical Equality* that opposes any unique leadership role for men in the family and the church. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, in the introduction of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), describe the supporters of this organization:

*These authors differ from secular feminists because they do not reject the Bible's authority or truthfulness, but rather give new interpretations of the Bible to support their claims. We may call them "evangelical feminists" because by personal commitment to Jesus Christ and by profession of belief in the total truthfulness of Scripture they still identify themselves very clearly with evangelicalism. Their arguments have been detailed, earnest, and persuasive to many Christians. What has been the result? Great uncertainty among evangelicals. Men and women simply are not sure what their roles should be ... The controversy shows signs of intensifying, not subsiding. Before the struggle ends, probably no Christian family and no evangelical church will remain untouched.*

# West Suffolk Baptist Church



# West Suffolk Epistle



## ***The Attack on God's Design***

*Continued from Page 1*

While many in our culture are attempting to remove feminist ideals from the mainstream of society, the church has allowed access to those same ideals within her hallowed walls. But we shouldn't be surprised, because the feminist attack on the people of God is as old as man. Feminism began in the Garden when Eve, who we could call the first feminist, listened to Satan's lies, stepped out from under Adam's authority, acted independently, and led the human race into sin.

Satan's goal from the start has been to overthrow God's design for His elect. That's why it's so tragic when the church is duped into helping him carry out his assault on God. What ought to be the strongest bastion of the truth of God is falling fast to the march of the feminist army. Those of us who hold to the integrity of God's Word cannot let it fall victim to the warped society around us.

Scripture is very clear about the place God has designed for men and women in society, in the family, and in the church. And it is to Scripture we must turn to reaffirm the wonders of God's design. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur - Different by Design**

## ***Forgiving One Another***

For a Christian to be willfully unforgiving is unthinkable. We who have been forgiven by God Himself have no right to withhold forgiveness from our fellow sinners. In fact, Scripture plainly commands us to forgive in the same manner as we have received forgiveness: "*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you*" (Ephesians 4:32).

God commands us to forgive others—it reflects His character. Unforgivingness is therefore ungodly. That means unforgivingness is no less an offense to God than fornication or drunkenness, even though we don't often think of those sins as equally onerous. Certainly unforgivingness is more frequently found in the open among the people of God than the sins we typically regard as heinous. But Scripture is clear that God despises an unforgiving spirit (Matthew 18:21–35).

As God's children, we are to mirror His character. At salvation we are given a new nature that bears God's spiritual likeness (Ephesians 4:24). So forgiveness is an integral part of the Christian's new nature. An unforgiving Christian is a contradiction in terms. When you see a professing Christian who stubbornly refuses to relinquish a grudge, there's good reason to question the genuineness of that person's faith.

### **Unnatural Forgiveness**

Yet to face the issue squarely, we must all admit that forgiveness does not come easily, even as Christians. Often we do not forgive as speedily or as graciously as we should. We're all too prone to nurse offenses and withhold forgiveness.

# West Suffolk Baptist Church



## West Suffolk Epistle



### ***Forgiving One Another***

*Continued from Page 2*

Forgiveness is costly. It requires us to set aside our selfishness, accept with grace the wrongs others have committed against us, and not demand what we think is our due. All of that runs counter to our natural, sinful inclinations. Even as new creatures, we retain a remainder of sin in our flesh. Sinful habits and desires continue to plague us. That is why Scripture commands us to put off the old man and clothe ourselves with the new (Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:9–10). And the new man is characterized by forgiveness—it is an essential garment for “*the new self*” (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

#### **Essential Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is so important to the Christian’s walk that it was never far from the focus of what Christ taught. At the heart of the Lord’s Prayer is this petition: “*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*” (Matthew 6:12). Both the context and the cross-reference in Luke 11:4 indicate that the “*debts*” referred to here are spiritual debts; “*debtors*” are those who have committed transgressions against us.

It is significant that of all the phrases in the Lord’s Prayer, it was this phrase that Christ saw fit to explain in the most detail. Immediately after the prayer’s amen, He turned to the disciples and said,

*For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:14–15).*

That has always been a difficult passage for expositors. At first glance it seems to make God’s forgiveness revocable. Some have cited this verse to argue that if we refuse forgiveness to those who offend us, God will withdraw His forgiveness from us, implying that a Christian who does not forgive can lose his or her salvation.

But the forgiveness spoken of here is not the judicial forgiveness of justification. It is the daily, parental forgiveness we are to seek when our sin has grieved our heavenly Father. One interpretive key is the prayer’s address: “*Our Father*.” This is a prayer for parental, not judicial, forgiveness. What Jesus is actually saying here is tantamount to: “*If you refuse to forgive, your heavenly Father will discipline you severely for your sin of unforgivingness.*”

#### **Pharisaical Forgiveness**

But that divine priority concerning forgiveness wasn’t shared by the Pharisees. Most of the influential religious teachers of Jesus’ day portrayed forgiveness as optional. The rabbis did acknowledge that the Old Testament permitted and even encouraged forgiveness in some cases. However, they strictly limited to three the number of times any person could be forgiven for the same offense.

# West Suffolk Baptist Church



## West Suffolk Epistle



### *Forgiving One Another*

*Continued from Page 3*

They believed they had biblical authority for that view. They drew support for it from the book of Amos, where God pronounced doom on the enemies of Israel with these words: *“For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its punishment”* (Amos 1:3). In that same chapter God pronounced similar judgments against Gaza, Tyre, Edom, and Ammon, always with the words, *“For three transgressions . . . and for four”* (Amos 1:6, 9, 11, 13). In other words, each of those hostile nations was permitted three offenses that God overlooked, and He judged them for the fourth offense.

The rabbinical scholars reasoned that if God forgives men only three times, it would be presumptuous and even wrong for mere creatures to forgive their fellow creatures any more than that. So they set a limit on the number of times forgiveness could be extended.

No doubt because of the stress on grace and forgiveness throughout Christ’s teachings, the apostles knew that He was calling them to a higher standard. Since Christ Himself had never quantified the number of times forgiveness is to be granted, Peter wanted to get some clarification. Matthew 18:21 says, *“Then Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’”*

Peter no doubt thought he was being magnanimous. He doubled the rabbinical prescription, then rounded the number up to a perfect 7, possibly thinking the Lord might commend him for his generosity. Jesus’ reply undoubtedly stunned Peter and all the other disciples.

#### **Unlimited Forgiveness**

Jesus said to him, *“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven”* (Matthew 18:22). The fleshly mind immediately protests what seems an unreasonable standard. Doesn’t forgiveness have a limit? Common sense would seem to suggest that repeat offenders should not be granted pardon indefinitely. At what point does grace become gullibility? Seventy times seven is 490! No one can possibly even keep count of such a high number of offenses!

But that is precisely the point! Keeping count has nothing to do with true forgiveness. If an offense is sincerely forgiven, it cannot be held against the offender. The rabbinical system in effect required the offended party to remember and record supposedly forgiven offenses and stop forgiving after the third time. Jesus’ teaching eliminated any limit on forgiveness whatsoever. *“Seventy times seven”* set the standard so high that it would be pointless to keep an account of the injuries we have borne. But that is fitting, because the sort of love Christians are called to exemplify *“does not take into account a wrong suffered”* (1 Corinthians 13:5).

# West Suffolk Baptist Church



## West Suffolk Epistle



### ***Forgiving One Another***

*Continued from Page 4*

Since God's forgiveness sets the criterion by which we are to forgive, the standard is set blessedly high. What may seem at first like an impossibly unfair and unattainable standard is in fact wonderful news for anyone who has ever needed to seek the forgiveness of God for repeat offenses. Jesus is teaching here that the forgiveness we extend to others should be as boundless as the mercy of God we desire for ourselves. That shatters all the limits anyone would try to place on human forgiveness.

Genuine forgiveness is not feigned or grudging, but is given as freely as we ourselves desire to be forgiven. It involves a deliberate refusal to hold the guilt over the head of the offender. It means ending the bitterness, laying aside anger, and refusing to dwell on the offense that has been forgiven. It is a complete letting go of any thought of retaliation or reprisal. It is, as nearly as possible, the human equivalent of what God promises—to remember the sin no more (Jeremiah 31:34).

Such forgiveness does not come easy, particularly when it deals with the kinds of sins that destroy lives and relationships. When we're talking about a personal slight or an unkind word, it's relatively easy to forgive. But what if the offense is more serious? Where do people find the strength to forgive when they discover a spouse has cheated, or when a drunk driver causes the death of a loved one? Is it humanly possible to forgive such offenses?

It may not seem humanly possible, and it certainly does not lie within the power of fallen human nature alone to forgive such things from the heart. But it certainly is possible for redeemed people, under the influence of the Holy Spirit's power, to forgive even the most serious offenses. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

### ***Every Thought Captive***

In our day, many Christians have a view of church history that is a popular, but unfortunate, caricature. They believe the church started in the first century, but then soon fell into apostasy. The true faith was lost until Martin Luther recovered it in the sixteenth century. Then, nothing at all significant happened until the twentieth century, when Billy Graham started hosting his evangelistic crusades. Regrettably, we form caricatures of history on account of our ignorance of history. Too often, our historical awareness is sorely lacking. What's more, we don't fully know where we are, because we don't know where we've been. We might be aware of certain historical figures and events, but we are often unacquainted with what our sovereign Lord has been doing in all of history, particularly in those periods that are less familiar to us.

This is the seventeenth year that we at Tabletalk are focusing on a specific century of church history, and we do so in order that the church of the twenty-first century would better understand how the Lord has worked throughout history to keep His promises. For Christ has promised to build His church and that the gates of hell will never prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Every century has a story to tell about Christ's faithfulness to His promise, even those centuries that are perhaps less well known to us than others.

# West Suffolk Baptist Church



# West Suffolk Epistle



## Every Thought Captive

*Continued from Page 5*

We rightly celebrate the lives and ministries of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformers whom the Lord used to help bring the church back to the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Yet the Reformation did not end with the passing of the sixteenth century. The gospel seed planted by the fifteenth-century forerunners of the Reformation was watered and tended by the Reformers in the sixteenth century. However, it is in the seventeenth century that we begin to see the full flowering of Reformed doctrine, piety, and practice. During the seventeenth century, so much of what it means to be Protestant and Reformed was codified in the creeds and confessions that we affirm and confess today.

Rome was not built in a day, and neither was the confessional, Reformed, Protestant church. The faithful men and women of the seventeenth century continued the work of the sixteenth-century Reformers by bringing every doctrine, every practice, and every thought captive to the Word of God. May they serve as a model to us as we stand on their shoulders, holding firmly to the divinely revealed truths they faithfully proclaimed for the sake of Christ's church, kingdom, and glory. ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons**

## *A Mind Captivated by God*

I have journeyed through the land of Narnia. Nearly ten years ago, I had the privilege to stay at Rathvinden House, located in the beautiful rolling-green countryside of County Carlow, Ireland. At that time, the Rathvinden estate was owned and operated by Douglas Gresham, the stepson of C.S. Lewis.

Late one afternoon, as I was walking on the grounds of the estate with a friend, we came across a lush, green pasture that was simply breathtaking. As we stood atop that pasture and beheld its majesty, one of our hosts turned to us and said, "We call this the land of Narnia." It was as if we had entered a different world. And knowing that we were not too far from Lewis' birthplace, I felt as if I had entered the very world of C.S. Lewis himself.

Although he was not a professed Calvinist, Lewis was indeed a professed Christian, and his professed atheism the Lord sovereignly overcame by taking him from his own dark, atheistic world, where it is always winter but never Christmas, and placing him in the world of Jesus Christ, who is on the move to destroy every stronghold, argument, and lofty opinion raised against God so that we might take every thought captive to obey Christ and live **Coram Deo**, before His face and in His realm, forever.

By His grace, the Lord took captive the mind of C.S. Lewis, and Lewis, in turn, captivated the minds of Christians throughout the world as he penned words such as these: *"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this."* ~ **Dr. Burk Parsons**

# West Suffolk Baptist Church

## Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant



# West Suffolk Epistle



If you have a birthday or anniversary in February 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 [gwlclf0415@gmail.com](mailto:gwlclf0415@gmail.com).

### *Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner February 2026*

#### Birthdays

**Katie A. (10)**      **Jacob David K. (24)**  
**Tina K. (13)**      **Angelina A. (27)**  
**Rita B. (14)**      **Brodie L. (27)**  
**Andy L. (14)**

#### Anniversaries

**Jonathan and April F. (5)**  
**Daniel and Diana K. (11)**  
**Mike and Rose M. (17)**

### **Straining Toward the Goal Philippians 3:12—16**

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ~ *ESV*



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Please submit information to the editor by the second Sunday of each month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.

**Disclaimer:** The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or its leadership.

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