

West Suffolk Baptist Church

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant



West Suffolk Epistle



Volume 13 Issue 8

August 2026

Does God require me to give a tithe of all I earn?

Two kinds of giving are taught consistently throughout Scripture: giving to the government (always compulsory), and giving to God (always voluntary).

The issue has been greatly confused, however, by some who misunderstand the nature of the Old Testament tithes. Tithes were not primarily gifts to God, but taxes for funding the national budget in Israel.

Because Israel was a theocracy, the Levitical priests acted as the civil government. So the Levite's tithe (Leviticus 27:30-33) was a precursor to today's income tax, as was a second annual tithe required by God to fund a national festival (Deuteronomy 14:22-29). Smaller taxes were also imposed on the people by the law (Leviticus 19:9-10; Exodus 23:10-11). So the total giving required of the Israelites was not 10 percent, but well over 20 percent. All that money was used to operate the nation.

All giving apart from that required to run the government was purely voluntary (cf. Exodus 25:2; 1 Chronicles 29:9). Each person gave whatever was in his heart to give; no percentage or amount was specified.

New Testament believers are never commanded to tithe. Matthew 22:15-22 and Romans 13:1-7 tell us about the only required giving in the church age, which is the paying of taxes to the government. Interestingly enough, we in America presently pay between 20 and 30 percent of our income to the government--a figure very similar to the requirement under the theocracy of Israel.

The guideline for our giving to God and His work is found in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7: "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver." ~ **Dr. John MacArthur** (1939 - 2025)

A Conscience Captive to God's Word

When Martin Luther was summoned to the Diet of Worms in 1521 and asked to recant his teaching, he replied:

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience would be neither right nor safe. God help me. Here I stand, I can do no other.

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



A Conscience Captive to God's Word

Continued from Page 1

Luther's well-known formulation, "Scripture and plain reason," is the only basis on which we can properly ground true spiritual discernment. Discernment is the ability to understand, interpret, and apply truth skillfully. Discernment is a cognitive act. Therefore no one who spurns right doctrine or sound reason can be truly discerning.

Authentic spiritual discernment must begin with Scripture—revealed truth. Without a firm grounding in divine revelation, human reason always degenerates into skepticism (a denial that anything can be known for certain), rationalism (the theory that reason is a source of truth), secularism (an approach to life that purposely excludes God), or any number of other anti-Christian philosophies. When Scripture condemns human wisdom (1 Corinthians 3:19), it is denouncing not reason *per se*, but humanistic ideology divorced from the divinely revealed truth of God's Word. In other words, reason apart from the Word of God leads inevitably to unsound ideas, but reason subjected to the Word of God is at the heart of wise spiritual discernment.

The Westminster Confession of Faith clearly recognizes the formula of Scripture and sound reason as the basis of discernment. The Confession states, "The whole counsel of God . . . is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" (chapter 1, section 6). In other words, sound and careful logic must be applied to Scripture to yield a full and mature understanding of the spiritual truth God has revealed. This is no denial of the sufficiency of Scripture. The formula is not Scripture plus philosophy, but Scripture interpreted by careful, sensible, thoughtful, Spirit-directed reasoning. That is the essence of discernment.

In short, anti-intellectualism is incompatible with genuine spiritual wisdom. Those who think of faith as the abandonment of reason cannot be truly discerning. Irrationality and discernment are polar opposites. When Paul prayed that the Philippians' love would "*abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment*" (Philippians 1:9, emphasis added), he was affirming the rationality of true faith. He also meant to suggest that knowledge and discernment necessarily go hand in hand with genuine spiritual growth.

Biblical faith, therefore, is rational. It is reasonable. It is intelligent. It makes good sense. And spiritual truth is meant to be rationally contemplated, examined logically, studied, analyzed, and employed as the only reliable basis for making wise judgments. That process is precisely what Scripture calls discernment.

God's truth is a precious commodity that must be handled carefully—not diluted with whimsical beliefs or bound up in human traditions. When a church loses its will to discern between sound doctrine and error, between good and evil, between truth and lies, that church is doomed.

The apostle John drew a very sharp distinction between Christianity and the spirit of antichrist—and he zealously held the line.

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



A Conscience Captive to God's Word

Continued from Page 2

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds (2 John 9–11).

Thus John commanded those under his spiritual oversight to be watchful and discerning—and to have nothing to do with Christ-denying error or the purveyors of it.

Contrast that with Christians today who soothe themselves with the opinion that few things are really black and white. Doctrinal issues, moral questions, and Christian principles are all cast in hues of gray. No one is supposed to draw any definitive lines or declare any absolutes. Every person is encouraged to do what is right in his own eyes—exactly what God forbade (Deuteronomy 12:8; Judges 17:6; 21:25).

The church will never manifest its power in society until we regain a passionate love for truth and a corollary hatred for error. True Christians cannot condone or disregard anti-Christian influences in their midst and expect to enjoy God's blessing.

Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. (Romans 13:11–12 KJV) ~ **Dr. John MacArthur (1939 - 2025)**

Faith minus Reason Equals Irrational Unbelief

Many people mistakenly think of faith as inherently noble. A once-popular song extols the virtue of faith, or believing: "I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows."

No one really believes that, of course, but that is not the point. The song is a paean to faith—without regard to the content of that faith. The object of faith was of no concern to the songwriter. The sentiment that song expresses is by no means biblical. It is an echo of one of the worst lies of our age—the notion that it isn't important what you believe as long as you believe passionately enough.

Did you know that faith can be seriously harmful? Some varieties of faith actually lead away from the true God—they substitute superstition, falsehood, or faith itself in place of truth. Such faith inevitably leads to spiritual disaster. It is reckless faith.

Reckless faith goes to two extremes. At one end of the spectrum it looks within—relying on feelings, inner voices, fantasy, or subjective sensations. At the other extreme it fixes its hope on some external human authority—the teachings of a supreme leader, religious tradition, magisterial dogma, or some other arbitrary canon.

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



Faith minus Reason Equals Irrational Unbelief

Continued from Page 3

An obvious non-Christian example of the first extreme is New Age mysticism. A similar example of the second is Islam. But even among groups that profess Christianity, both varieties of reckless faith are clearly seen. The charismatic movement, for example, tends toward the first extreme; Roman Catholicism epitomizes the second.

(Interestingly, there have been recent developments of a strong convergence occurring between the charismatic movement and Roman Catholicism. Such a bizarre unity reminds us that the vast spectrum of theological errors all flow out of one satanic origin.)

Note that at both poles, reckless faith seeks spiritual truth apart from Scripture—and that is the very point at which it becomes reckless. Both kinds of reckless faith also have this in common: they are irrational and anti-intellectual. “Anti-intellectual” doesn’t mean they oppose intellectual snobbery. It means they spurn the intellect and encourage blind, uncritical trust. Anti-intellectuals often set faith against reason, as if the two were opposites. That kind of faith is gullibility. It is foolishness, and not biblical faith. Biblical faith is never irrational.

Authentic faith, in contrast, can never bypass the mind. It cannot be irrational. Faith, after all, deals with truth. Truth is objective data to be known, studied, contemplated, and understood. All those are activities that engage the intellect.

That means genuine Christianity cannot be anti-intellectual. The body of truth on which our faith is based has depths that are mysterious—unfathomable to the merely human mind, or inscrutable—but truth is never irrational. The difference is all-important. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Therefore what God says is true—and the antithesis of what He says must be false. Truth cannot be self-contradictory. Truth makes sense; nonsense cannot be true.

Moreover, the doctrine on which we base our faith must be sound—which is to say it must be biblical (1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:2–3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). *“If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing”* (1 Timothy 6:3–4, emphasis added). Sound, biblical doctrine therefore underlies all true wisdom and authentic faith. The attitude that scorns doctrine while elevating feelings or blind trust cannot legitimately be called faith, even if it masquerades as Christianity. It is actually an irrational form of unbelief.

God holds us accountable for what we believe as well as how we think about the truth He has revealed. All Scripture testifies to the fact that God wants us to know and understand the truth. He wants us to be wise. His will is that we use our minds. We are supposed to think, to meditate—to be discerning.

“Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” (Proverbs 2:2–6) ~ **Dr. John MacArthur (1939 - 2025)**

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



Mass verbicide in New York: State legislature moves to replace mother and father with “gestating parent” and “non-gestating parent”

If you kill a language, you kill an entire universe of meaning. C. S. Lewis famously decried what he called “verbicide” or “the murder of a word.” As you might expect, Lewis saw this as a great crime. We can only imagine what he would think of the State of New York, where legislators have moved to replace “mother” with “gestating parent” in the law.

Sadly, this is serious, and the subversion goes well beyond motherhood. The legislature has already passed the legislation, and it is now before New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, who faces one of those moments that determine whether civilization stands or falls. That’s no exaggeration.

As the editorial board of the Wall Street Journal notes, the effort is part of legislation intended to “purge gendered language from state family law.” Just ponder that for a moment. The natural family is predicated upon the fundamental truth that God made human beings as male and female, assigned marriage as the union of one man and one woman, and assigned the task of being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth with children to that married couple. Henceforth, the male parent is the father and the female parent is the mother. This pattern has been assumed and unconfused throughout most of human history. Until now, that is.

The moral revolutionaries and gender ideologues are determined to subvert creation order, and the subversion of language is one of their central strategies. They have worked hard to redefine marriage, going so far as to demand the legalization of what they call same-sex marriage. They also want to subvert parenthood, which actually becomes quite necessary if same-sex couples, who cannot produce a child, nevertheless demand children and legal recognition as parents.

The advent of IVF and surrogate motherhood (combined into a vast commercial industry, by the way) allows same-sex couples and single individuals to “have” a baby without actually having a baby in the natural sense. But, wouldn’t you know it, the language just doesn’t cooperate.

Just a few weeks ago, Americans celebrated Mother’s Day. Even in our morally confused age, the vast majority of Americans still know what a mother is. Father’s Day now looms before us, and most Americans also know what a father is. For good reason, family law assumes that distinction. As a matter of fact, a good portion of family law exists to identify mothers and fathers and to assign their respective duties and roles. The language of mother and father is absolutely central and essential to that civilizational project.

Nevertheless, New York’s state legislature wants to redefine mothers as “gestating parents” and fathers as “non-gestating parents.” Clearly, they want to subvert the entire order of nature with a new ideological order intended to deny the fact that the gestating parent is a mother and the non-gestating parent is a father.

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



Mass verbicide in New York: State legislature moves to replace mother and father with “gestating parent” and “non-gestating parent”

Continued from Page 5

But wait just a minute. The subversion is actually even greater than first imagined, since if you have a baby born to one woman in what New York recognizes as a same-sex marriage, the other woman would become the “non-gestating parent.” Thus, the category of “non-gestating parent” would quickly include both fathers (forgive the use of that archaic word for a moment) and the non-gestating woman married, presumably, to a gestating woman (or something like that). In the case of a male same-sex couple, both would be “non-gestating” though one of them at least could have donated the semen. Perhaps New York will have to define a “sperm-donative parent,” who, even at this point in modern technology, still must be a biological male, and thus, brace for it, a man.

The legislation also calls for the replacement of “putative father” in paternity cases with “alleged parent.” An article in the Advocate, a national LGBTQ publication, describes the legislation as a bill “that would make the state’s child custody laws gender neutral.” Gender neutral? The proposed language is downright Orwellian.

The Advocate also reported that a document from New York’s Family Court Advisory and Rules Committee recommended that the state “substitute existing gendered terminology in the state’s family court law with gender neutral terms.” A draft of the report claimed that ideas about parenthood “have shifted dramatically in recent years” The report continued: “The committee is proposing a measure to fill this gap and to modernize New York’s statutory structure.”

So, words like mother and father would disappear entirely. We can presume that the state will still try to locate “alleged parents” for child support. With mothers and fathers gone, all that is left is the gestating parents and non-gestating parents, but that distinction cannot bear the legal weight. Gender-neutral pronouns will be mandated, which will mean that the state will be concerned with finding neglectful non-gestating parents while acting as if it does not know that the gestating parent is a woman or that the non-gestating parent is a man. The transgender ideology is central to this entire project, for these are the people now telling us that women can have prostate glands and men can menstruate.

Bless their hearts, New York’s Catholic bishops released a statement accusing the legislators of action that “will further muddy what is true and good.” They are right of course, but they seem to miss the point that muddying and subverting what is good and true is the central goal of the entire project. The goal of this insanity is nothing less than the collapse of truth, creation order, marriage, morality, and civilization itself. Verbicide is the next step, but it’s not where this ends. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



Watching What We Wear

There are many complicated and confusing theological issues in the Christian life—issues that require deep intellectual research and sophisticated analysis, issues that call for multidisciplinary scholarship and expertise, issues that cannot be meaningfully addressed in an opinion column of several hundred words.

Thankfully, modesty is not one of those issues.

It seems that at least once a year, probably around spring and summer, Christians start arguing about modesty. As a pastor and a parent, I know this is a real-world issue that we can't avoid. The biblical commands regarding modesty are something we will either heed, however imperfectly, or simply ignore. We should choose the former. To be sure, these discussions are always culturally conditioned and full of gray areas. The Bible doesn't give us a catalog from Promise Lands' End (I'm sorry, I couldn't resist) featuring acceptable outfits and divinely approved bathing suits. Modesty won't look exactly the same in every time, in every place, and in every context. But modesty in dress—and that's the kind of modesty I'm thinking about in this piece—does mean something, and we can get to that something if we keep three simple truths in mind.

One, modesty can be too rigidly applied and too insensitively enforced. It's hard to talk about modesty with Christians without someone recalling their harrowing experience with dresses that weren't supposed to rise above the ankle, or with youth retreats doling out detailed lists of do's and don't's, or with parents enforcing conformity to an austere aesthetic without much in the way of explanation or grace. And this is to say nothing of the awkward conversations—cringey at best and totally inappropriate at worst—that Christian men sometimes have with Christian women about their clothes or their figure. Since modesty often (but not always) has to do with what women wear, and since authority figures in conservative Christian circles are often (and rightly) men, fathers and pastors and church leaders and teachers ought to take great care in how they approach this subject. This first point is not mere throat clearing. Young women really have been hurt by the dumb and sometimes sinful things communicated by an overwrought modesty culture.

Two, the lack of modesty in women is no excuse for a lack of godliness in men. This is usually the first retort when the modesty maelstrom starts swirling yet again: "So, you're saying that if some guy starts harassing a woman it's her fault? Let me get this straight, I'm responsible for what a man looks at and what goes on in his twisted heart?" Let's be clear: when we sin, we are responsible. No one sins for us. The fact that one person dresses provocatively does not mean that someone else is justified in leering, lusting, or worse. Had Joseph given in to Potiphar's wife it would have been a great wickedness, no matter how seductive she tried to be (Genesis 39:9). Men are called to be pure in heart, regardless of whether the world or the people around them make that pursuit easier or harder.

Three, the Bible commands the Christian to dress modestly and to avoid drawing attention to our bodies in a sexual way. This is not the same as saying that women and men must look homely and as plain as possible. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel were all commended for their beauty. But Rebekah also covered herself when Isaac drew near (Genesis 24:65). There is a difference between beauty and sensuality. Women should not dress like brazen prostitutes seeking to entice wayward men (Proverbs 7:10; Ezekiel 16:30).

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



Watching What We Wear

Continued from Page 7

The Lord does not look fondly upon haughty women who walk with outstretched necks, who glance wantonly with their eyes, who strut about like luxury and allurements on parade (Isaiah 3:16-26). If there is proper clothing that Paul commands Christian women to wear (1 Timothy 2:9-10), then it stands to reason some apparel must be improper. God cares about what we wear, and although there are no exact rules about what is appropriate, some types of clothing and some ways of presenting ourselves are inappropriate.

The problem with immodesty is that it communicates at least two things that do not square with Christian discipleship. **First**, immodesty signals a lack of concern for others in the body of Christ, a disregard for how our choices affect others. **Second**, immodesty communicates, “My physical beauty is the best thing I have to offer, so I will show off all that I have.” In truth, that’s likely not what those who dress immodestly really believe. The immodest dresser often thinks very little of herself (or himself). Revealing apparel is a way to compensate for a lack of faith in what makes them truly beautiful. Healthy modesty, by contrast, says “I have something to keep private, not because I hate my body, but because the body God gave me is so good, beautiful, and pleasing that I am not going to reveal it to everyone.”

We often hear that any insistence on female modesty is yet another attempt to control women’s bodies and to shame them for being sexual beings. That logic may sound powerful in today’s cultural climate, but it lacks Biblical coherence. As Christians, we know that our bodies are emphatically not our own and that our bodies are not meant ultimately for self-expression or self-fulfillment but for God’s glory (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). None of us should feel ashamed for being sexual creatures, but we should be ashamed to show off certain features of our anatomy in public. The reality is we all have “unpresentable parts”—parts of the body that are not evil but are to be “treated with greater modesty” (1 Corinthians 12:23). To call upon Christians—women and men—to cover up these parts is not cruel and unusual punishment. In truth, it’s an important way we honor God and love one another. ~ **Kevin DeYoung** - **Senior Pastor Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina and Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC.**

Let None Escape

When the prophet Elijah had received the answer to his prayer, and the fire from heaven had consumed the sacrifice in the presence of all the people, he called upon the assembled Israelites to take the priests of Baal and sternly cried, “*Let not one of them escape.*” He took them all down to the brook Kishon and slew them there. So must it be with our sins—they are all doomed; not one must be preserved.

Our darling sin must die. Do not spare it because it cries. Strike though it be as dear as a beloved son. Strike, for God struck at sin when it was laid upon His own Son. With stern unflinching purpose you must condemn to death that sin that was once the idol of your heart. Do you ask how you are to accomplish this? Jesus will be your power. You have grace to overcome sin, given you in the covenant of grace; you have strength to win the victory in the crusade against inward lusts because Christ Jesus has promised to be with you even unto the end.

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



Let None Escape

Continued from Page 8

If you would triumph over darkness, set yourself in the presence of the Sun of Righteousness. There is no place so well adapted for the discovery of sin and recovery from its power and guilt as the immediate presence of God. Job never knew how to get rid of sin half as well as he did when his eye of faith rested upon God, and then he abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes.

The fine gold of the Christian is often becoming dim. We need the sacred fire to consume the dross. Let us fly to our God. He is a consuming fire; He will not consume our spirit, but our sins. Let the goodness of God excite us to a sacred jealousy and to a holy revenge against those iniquities that are hateful in His sight. Go forth to battle in His strength and utterly destroy the accursed crew: "Let not one of them escape." ~ *C.H. Spurgeon*

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 Corinthains 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, (1939—2017)*

West Suffolk Baptist Church

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant



West Suffolk Epistle



If you have a birthday or anniversary in August 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 August 2026

Birthdays

Ben S. (8)

Harper K. (11)

Melody A. (22)

Carrie P. (24)

Ezra P. (26)

Marlin H. (27)

Julian H. (27)

Anniversaries

Jared and Hannah E. (4)

Mike and Cheryl P. (9)

The New Heaven and the New Earth Revelation 21:1-4 (ESV)

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."



***West Suffolk Baptist
Church
Leadership***

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.

Office: 1001 Kenyon Court, Suffolk, VA 23435 (Across from Paul D. Camp Community College)

E-Mail: sftmfs@gmail.com

Website: <https://www.graceforsuffolk.org>

Phone/Fax: 757-539-0363

Teaching Pastor/Elder: Pastor Mike Prince (Front Center)

Teaching Elders: Scott Thomas (LF) and Ben Scofield (RF)

Deacons: Marlin Halsey, John McPhatter and John Hurst (L to R)(Back Row)

Editor: Walt Lawrence, gwlcf10415@gmail.com/757-619-3268

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.