

Gospel Gleaner

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The Gospel Gleaner

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Inside this Issue

Andy Erwin

The March-April issue of the *Gospel Gleaner* consists of articles on a variety of timely topics. We have articles from a few men who write regularly for the paper and two articles from first-time writers for the *Gleaner*. I am thankful to be able to publish articles from these men – Bill Irby and Cody Westbrook.

Truly, the *Gleaner* is intended to be a paper for the brotherhood. I encourage all faithful preachers, teachers, and students of the scriptures to consider writing for the *Gleaner*. I would like to especially encourage young men to write. We have an article from Jackson Erwin in this issue. Jackson's first published article was in the *Gleaner* a few years ago on the Shroud of Turin. I think he was fourteen!

We are also honored to have one of the fine elders from West Fayetteville contributing an article. Van Massey has written a most-needed article through his love for the church and his desire to see her grow spiritually and numerically. Since the *Gleaner* has been under the eldership at West Fayetteville, the readership has nearly tripled. Without West Fayetteville, there would be no *Gospel Gleaner* today. Thank you for your contribution to the paper!

We pray this issue will help every reader grow in God's grace and knowledge. For the Lord, His word, and His church!

The Power of Penitence

Bill Irby

According to Luke's record in the book of Acts, Peter provided two examples of the power of penitence. It may be that we sometimes forget how powerful repentance really is. These days we are interested in a vaccine that will help protect us from the Covid-19 virus. Tests are being done to determine the efficacy of the possible vaccines. I am sure that a vaccine with 100% effectiveness is desired, though such a thing may not be possible.

However, when it comes to a person's sins, true Biblical penitence has perfect efficacy. It is absolutely effective in eradicating a person's sin, no matter how heinous that sin may be. Peter helps us see this.

Take his first reference to penitence in Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Remember for a moment the people to whom he was preaching. Some of these people were guilty of partaking in the crucifixion of Jesus, identified by Peter as both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). This truth cut them to the heart, so they desired that Peter would tell them what to do.

As we know, he told them to repent and be baptized. Here was a situation where people had taken part in the unjust killing of an innocent man. Add to

that the fact that they had killed not just any innocent man but the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:18). And yet, Peter told them that if they would repent (that is, completely turn away from their sins) and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, their sins would be remitted. Penitence is a very powerful thing as it was part of the process by which the killing of God's Son could be forgiven!

In Acts 3 we find Peter preaching again, this time after the healing of a lame beggar. In this sermon Peter said to the people gathered on Solomon's porch: "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses." Peter went on to say that it was by the name of Jesus that the lame man had been made whole and that the entire matter of Jesus Christ had been foretold in Scripture.

Then Peter said this: "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). This is another example of the power of penitence. These people had preferred

Barabbas in place of Jesus, yet if they would repent and be converted (that is, obey the gospel) their sins would be blotted out. Even the sin of killing the Prince of life can be forgiven upon doing the will of God.

There is one other thing regarding the power of penitence that we must note. Penitence must be real. Repenting is not merely reporting. One can easily admit to sin. Repentance is more than admission. It is a change of mind and heart, followed by a real change of life. It is not an easy thing to do. But we know that, often, good is not easy and easy is not good. We remember that Paul said, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly sorrow is real sorrow over one’s sins; the sorrow of the world is often sorrow over getting caught.

Real penitence is a great blessing. All of us need to practice it ourselves and accept it in others. It is a powerful thing!



THE HONEYBEE AND THE BUZZARD

Raymond Elliott

Surely we all have some knowledge regarding this insect and this fowl. Both have been placed here on this earth for different purposes as designed by the Creator, God Almighty. While their functions are vital, they are radical in contrast. The buzzard is rather despised by the human family. We esteem this bird as being unsightly in appearance and undesirable because of its work, the devouring of dead carcasses. Yet, in the balance of nature, this scavenger has a rightful place in our environment. The honeybee, on the other hand, is well thought of and respected. While we dislike the sting of such a small insect, we do appreciate the delicious honey that it makes for us. The bee can be seen visiting the beautiful flowers and various blooms in the vegetative kingdom. No wonder the honey that this bee makes is so sweet.

Strangely enough, the buzzard and the honeybee remind us of the various attitudes and dispositions found in different people. Some folks enjoy dwelling on the ungodly, the gossip, the hearsay, the ugly, the bad, the filthy, the hurtful, and the immoral. They seem to get their kicks over telling or hearing a good piece of juicy slander. And, the worse it stinks, the better they like it. This old world is filled with individuals who love filthiness. The

Bible refers to people who “speak foolishness” and whose “heart will work iniquity” (Isaiah 32:6). Paul writes of the unrighteous in this manner, “Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Romans 3:13, 14). Their ultimate end is eternal perdition, for Jesus said in Matthew 12:36-37, “But I say to you that every idle word men shall speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

We are grateful, however, that there are many Christians who love the good and the beautiful things of life. They think upon that which is pure, honest, just, true, lovely, and of good report (Philippians 4:8). They feed upon the word of God that is “Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:10). They know that “Pleasant words are like honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul, and health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24). They “love life” and endeavor to “see good days;” therefore, they “refrain his tongue from evil” (1 Peter 3:10).

The question therefore is, “To be or not to be?” That is, are you soaring over dead carcasses and seeking the corrupt; or, are you feasting upon the beautiful and the good? Let us all “be” (live) like the honeybee and not the buzzard!

THE VOICE WITHIN

Ronald D. Bryant

Psalm 42:1-2 - As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

In this passage the psalmist speaks eloquently of the heart of the believer. He speaks of the depth of his faith, of his soul thirsting for God. In Psalm 63 he again states that God alone can satisfy the longings of his soul. Is it not the case that to long for God, in the things that He alone can provide, is in fact to turn one’s heart toward Him? Is it not true that to trust in Him is to embrace one’s highest and noblest thoughts and desires?

God gave us life, and He gave us those longings and desires. In those longings, has He not also supplied us with evidence and reason to believe; a logic with an eloquence that is not our own?

In life we face troubles and trials; we deal with fears and failings. And in each, because of God’s provision, we can embrace that which God supplies. We can turn to God! He alone can supply our needs and satisfy the longings of our souls. He is our only refuge.

When we seek those things which He alone can supply, consciously and unconsciously, are we not in reality seeking Him? In our darkest hours, is it

not to be considered that there is reason within our reasoning; that there is in our seeking Him a logic that has an eloquence all its own? We are assured by Him that He is near and that He cares for us, that He waits to be wanted. Prayerfully, consider the following:

We were made by God – capable of loving and of being loved.

We long to be loved! Every child deeply longs to be loved. That longing is universal, and no one outgrows that need. The desire to be loved is a desire that our Father gave us. In truly desiring to love, are we not desiring God, for He is love? That God is love is central in Scripture. It is His message to us.

1 John 4:8 - He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Romans 5:6-8 - For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We long to live. We despair of troubles brought on by infirmities and age, and yet we cling to life.

In doing so, are we not in fact longing for God, for it is He Who has given us life? Jesus came that might have life – abundant life. This fact is central in our response to God.

Acts 17:25 - Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed

anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

James 1:17 - Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Is it not appropriate to insist that God gave us life, that in it, we might seek Him and know Him and be one with Him?

In the life which God has given to us, we long to know acceptance.

Family and community are bound up in the experience of acceptance. The entirety of the way of Christ is bound up with knowing and experiencing and communicating acceptance. This longing for acceptance, as God defines it and proffers it, is it not actually a longing after Him? His continued presence is the established fact of His acceptance, and His desire is to be accepted that He might forgive and bless us. Paul declares that in and by Christ, God makes the redeemed acceptable.

Ephesians 1:3-7 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His

blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

The Lord God calls us to His acceptance – to life with Him in Christ. Christ came not to condemn but to save mankind.

We long to be comforted, to know a degree of release from trouble and despair.

Can it be affirmed that to long for this comfort is finally to be turned to God, for He is the God of all comfort? Paul declared:

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

Can we claim the words and the sentiments of the twenty-third psalm as our own?

Psalms 23:1-6 - The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores

my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.

Is it not axiomatic to declare that to long for comfort from God is to long for Him? To consider the invitation that Jesus gave is to be drawn into the prospect of “knowing Him.” He said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

The fact of sin in our lives leads us to long for forgiveness and restoration to God.

Release from sin and guilt and restoration to God is essential to peace for our souls. It is to be affirmed that to long for reconciliation is to long for God, for He is the author and provider of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 - Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has

committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

Our restoration to God and our peace in life is provided by Him. It is restoration to a right relationship with Him. It is provided for us in Christ, in our reconciliation to Him. He invites each of us to be reconciled to Him.

We long for eternal life. Is this longing God's voice in us, calling us to Him?

His glory fills the heavens (Isaiah 6:1-6). His goodness fills the earth (Ephesians 1:3-14). He is our only refuge in life. He alone is our soul's portion. He calls us to life eternal. We are eternal beings, and consciously or unconsciously, we come to Him – we move toward Him via the deep longings of our souls. We trust in Him. We hope in Him. The longings of our souls have been authored by Him, and our higher and nobler thoughts and desires are given to us by Him. Is it not correct to affirm that these desires and longings are His voice within us?



A Friendly Church

Van Massey

How friendly is your home congregation? Not sure? Ask a recent visitor. Recently, while on a little vacation, my wife and I attended another congregation for Bible class and worship. We had visited this congregation many, many times through the years and always loved it there. Something, however, about this visit was different, very different.

As we entered the building into the foyer and then into the auditorium, no one greeted us before Bible class. NO ONE! After class, two sisters who were sitting behind us were the only ones who acknowledged us before the worship hour. My brethren, these things ought not to be. Do you think we felt welcomed there? In fact, I told my wife that if we were in the area searching for a new church home, I would not be back.

Coldness among God's people is not good. Perhaps one of the most overlooked, untaught commands from God, is to "Greet one another" (Hebrews 13:24; Col. 4:15; Phil. 4:21; 2 Cor. 13:13; 1 Cor. 16:20; Rom.16:16). I am afraid that, in many places, these commands are not being taught and emphasized as they should. Why is this? Is it not important?

For years I have thought this was, for the most part, a "young people's" problem; but now, undeniable evidence says otherwise. Why and how

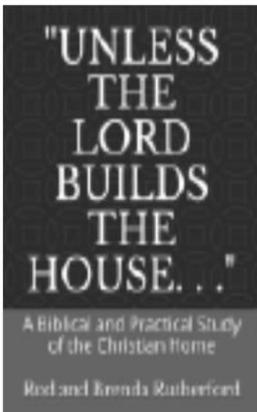
have so many Christians become this way – this cold and unfriendly?

It has been said that people may forget what you said, they may forget what you did, but they will NEVER forget how you made them feel. Brethren, we're losing out on many opportunities to encourage one another when we have absolutely no human contact with each other. For example, a text message or an email can have great blessings and benefits, but they can never compare to what a human touch can do.

Hearing the sincere, loving voice from a concerned brother or sister, a glad-to-see-you handshake, or a Christian embrace, I believe, is much more beneficial, not only to the recipient, but to the giver, as well. No doubt, some of you are thinking (as of the time of this writing), "We're in the midst of a

pandemic!" I fully understand; but does that excuse us from greeting and encouraging one another – even at a social distance and/or behind a mask? Of course, we have to be sensible about it, but please do not avoid one another altogether! I may have had a difficult week, and I need to see you and feel your encouragement, love, and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

Carefully consider the command of God from Eph. 4:32: "And be ye kind one to another." When brethren fail to greet or speak to one another, are they kind? Some may say, "But, I wasn't unkind." But were you kind? To be kind does not take a lot of effort, but it does take some. How kind and friendly are you? Are you teaching your children this principle? Brethren, may we never fail to greet and encourage one another!



New Book by Rod and Brenda Rutherford

A new book on the Christian home by Rod and Brenda Rutherford sets forth the plain teaching of God's Word on the family as God designed it. Specific applications are made to pressing problems and attacks on the home from our secular and humanistic society. It is ideal for teenage and young adult classes, sermon preparation and personal study.

The book is available from Amazon. Print version is \$9.00 and kindle ebook is \$2.99. The printed version can also be ordered from Rod Rutherford at rodrutherford@comcast.net.

Discounts are available for churches ordering ten or more.

The Age of Accountability

Tom McLemore

What is the age of accountability? Do the Scriptures give any information about the matter? Please contemplate the following and consider what bearing, if any, you think it might have on this question.

In Numbers 14, the Israelites murmured against Moses, Aaron, and the Lord because of the evil report ten of the twelve spies had made concerning the land that God had promised to give them. They expressed the intention of choosing a captain and going back to Egypt. To the Lord this meant that the people despised Him and did not believe in Him (in spite of all the signs He worked among them). He thought to strike them with pestilence, disinherit them, and make a nation of Moses. Moses pled with the Lord to pardon the people, and the Lord said that He had pardoned according to Moses' word.

Even so, in Numbers 14:29, the Lord swore to the Israelites that "your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and of all your number, numbered from twenty years old and upward who have murmured against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun."

If those under twenty years of age were accountable for sin, why did the Lord not include them in the

punishment? They had seen the Lord's glory and the signs that He did in Egypt (Numbers 14:22). They heard and, to some degree, had comprehended the evil report. Many of them may have despised the Lord, may have chosen not to believe the Lord, and may have murmured. Yet, only those twenty years old and upward were condemned to die in the wilderness and not enter the land of promise. Is it possible that those under twenty years of age were not considered by the Lord to be morally responsible?

In Deuteronomy 1:39, Moses recalled what the Lord said to those who were twenty years old and upward at the time of the rebellion: "Moreover your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall go in there, and to them I will give it, and they shall possess it." The Lord indicated that those not yet twenty years old *had no knowledge of good or evil*. This cannot be an absolute statement, for we know that one does not have to be twenty years of age before one is capable of knowing good and evil to a considerable degree. The fact remains, however, that the Lord did not hold any in Israel under twenty years of age *responsible*, even though they may have been *guilty*.

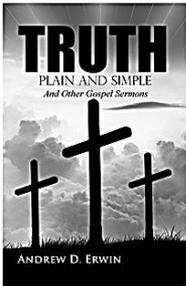
As one reads the law of Moses, does one imagine Israelites under twenty

years of age being held accountable for its obligations and violations? According to Deuteronomy 21:18-21, the stubborn and rebellious son (a glutton and a drunkard), who would not obey the voice of his parents, was to be stoned to death. Are we to imagine a child under twenty years of age being executed at the gate of the place where he lives? Is one compelled to envision Israelites under twenty years of age appearing before the sanctuary with sin, guilt, and peace offerings or making and honoring vows, etc. Israelites under twenty years of age may have been able to comprehend the idea of sin and guilt to a great degree, but does this mean that the Lord considered them responsible and accountable?

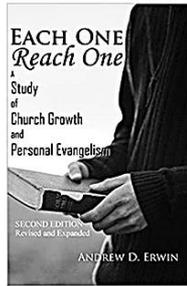
Those under twenty years of age in New Testament times may have been

able, to a considerable degree, to comprehend sin and guilt, to understand the gospel message, and to believe it. But did God consider them able to do these things *to such a degree that He held them responsible and accountable?* The Acts of the Apostles consistently tells of “men” and “women” responding to the gospel and being baptized (Acts 4:4; 5:14; 8:3, 12). It seems difficult to imagine that while Paul was persecuting to the death those who were of the Way, he was binding children and delivering them to prison (Acts 22:4).

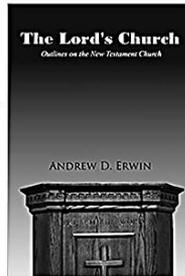
What is the age of accountability? Whatever the answer to the question may be, it seems that the information presented here should be considered.



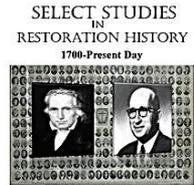
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The Proof of Ownership

Galatians 6:17

Introduction

1. The last argument Paul uses to defend his apostleship would be the permanent scars on his body that came from physical abuse he suffered for the cause of Christ.
2. “Marks” from “stigmata”- the brand whereby a master would mark his slave as his property.
3. We are owned by Christ. 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 1 Pet. 1:18
4. What marks us as one owned by Christ? (Not a crucifix; baptismal certificate; name on the church roll.) There are inward marks. 2 Cor. 5:17.

I. An Attitude of Obedience.

- A. The cross is the proof of Christ’s obedience. Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8, 9.
- B. The sufferings of Paul were proof of his obedience. 1 Cor. 9:16, 17.
- C. We become Christians and wear the name of Christ through obedience. Acts 26:28; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 4:17; Acts 11:26; Acts 4:12.

II. An Attitude of Endurance.

- A. The cross is the proof of the endurance of Jesus. Heb. 12:2, 3.
- B. Paul also knew the meaning of endurance. 2 Tim. 3:12; 4:6-8.
- C. Our endurance should be visible. Jas. 1:12; Acts 11:23; Matt. 24:13. (“Christians are a minority group in a heathen world.”)

III. An Attitude of Sacrifice.

- A. The cross is the proof of the self-sacrifice of Jesus. Matt. 20:28.
- B. Paul imitated the example of Jesus in his life. 2 Cor. 12:15; 1 Thess. 2:8.
- C. Self-sacrifice is the mark of a genuine Christian. Rom. 12:1, 2.
 - a. This is a part of repentance. Matt. 5:29, 30; 1 Cor. 9:27.
 - b. If self has been given, then other gifts will be right. 2 Cor. 8:5.
 - c. Jesus did not allow anything to keep Him away. Not family, friends, or foes. Lk. 4:16; Heb. 10:25

IV. An Attitude of Love.

- A. The cross is proof of divine love. Lk. 19:10; Matt. 26:28; Rom. 5:6-9
- B. Paul’s love for the lost was visible. Rom. 9:2, 3; Acts 20:18-27; 1 Cor. 9:19-23.
- C. Our love ought to be visible. Jn. 13:35; Matt. 28:18-20
 1. We are saved to serve. We cannot serve God without serving our fellow man.
 2. We are to be “fishers of men” not keepers of the aquarium.

Conclusion

1. Here are four identifying “inner” marks that one belongs to Jesus.
2. We may not have a mark on our body; but we ought to be able to say we have them in our heart.
3. Evil always leaves a mark on a man: sickness, impurity, intemperance, crime. Which mark do you have.

- Mike Kiser

Alcohol and the Church

Cody Westbrook

The novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, will be remembered historically for the societal adjustments it has produced on a world-wide scale. Business models have changed, dining out has changed, we shop differently, we consume media differently, and we have even developed an extended vocabulary. Words and phrases like “social distancing,” “flattening the curve,” and “self-isolation” have taken on new meaning. Another term, one that carries a great deal of weight, is “essential business.”

This expression produces much debate – understandably so. Thousands of people suddenly find themselves without work with one swipe of a governor’s pen because their businesses are not deemed essential. Additionally, many are puzzled at the seemingly subjective nature of determining the essentiality of a business. Why are big box stores like Wal-Mart and Home Depot considered essential, while small privately-owned businesses that sell the same products are not? A related, but far more important, question is why are liquor stores deemed essential? What does it say about society that a local hardware store cannot open, but a store that specializes in the Devil’s brew can? What reasons are given? How should the church react? These questions are all worthy of our consideration.

Alcohol as an Essential Business

The term “essential business” varies from state to state, but generally it refers to any business or service that society cannot function without. Grocery stores, hospitals, and public services would all be included, for example. That begs the question, why would alcohol fit the definition of something without which society could not function?

The answer is that alcohol is such a deeply rooted cultural component that making it unavailable is considered anathema by many. Philosopher Peg O’Connor summarizes the American view well:

Liquor is essential because many people believe it is essential to them. This is a peek into the American psyche. Simply put, the United States is a country steeped in alcohol; our culture is saturated. Not only do we have a right to drink, we tell ourselves in all sorts of ways we deserve to drink. We work hard, so we deserve a drink. We’ve had a bad day, so we deserve a drink to take the edge off. We’ve finally turned 21, so we deserve to drink. Times are tough or times are totally great, we deserve to drink. We’re scared, we deserve to drink. Rites of passages (birth, graduation, marriage, anniversaries, birthdays, retirement) are all occasions

deserving of alcoholic beverages. We drink alcohol to amplify feelings or to regulate them. Liquor comes to feel essential because we live in a culture that treats it as such. We treat it as such.¹

American culture insists on alcohol, but it does so to its own demise. The truth is that the exaltation of alcohol has created a physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual crisis. Consider the fact that nearly 15 million people suffer with what the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism calls Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD), and taking alcohol away from alcoholics overnight can be problematic and potentially deadly for the addict and those around him.

A Newsweek article from April 1, 2020, suggested “officials and advocates believe these stores [liquor stores CW] are an essential component of the broader healthcare system.” New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy included liquor stores in his list of essential business. In commenting on that action, the governor relayed the story “of a woman who was on her knees profusely thanking me for keeping the liquor stores open as it relates to just the whole addiction front.”

George F. Koob, director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, said, “each year there are

roughly 250,000 emergency department visits and 850 deaths related to alcohol withdrawal.” He further stated, “Abruptly limiting access to alcohol could lead to an increase in withdrawal among people with severe alcohol use disorder and add to the burden on the healthcare system.” He went on to suggest that the fact that many people turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism in a time of duress should be considered as well.²

There are at least two major points to glean from this information, neither of which is good. First, Americans have “added sin to sin” (Isa. 30:1) by creating a health dilemma related to alcohol. As has already been pointed out, swiftly taking away all alcohol from alcoholics would likely lead to terrible consequences.

All sorts of medical issues arise from withdrawal and other complications related to alcoholics being unable to feed their addiction. Additionally, the lives of friends and family members would be put in danger because of the uncontrolled rage that would surely follow many alcoholics not being able to access their drug.

This is the dilemma. We have allowed sin in the form of alcohol to occupy such a prominent role in society that taking it away would produce an entirely different set of difficult

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/philosophy-stirred-not-shaken/202003/why-are-liquor-stores-considered-essential-businesses>

² Information found in: <https://www.newsweek.com/marijuana-alcohol-covid-19-essential-businesses-1495600>

problems. Second, the tragic reality of our time is that thousands of people have no idea how to cope with the issues of life without alcohol. Wine, not God, is the source of strength and hope for too many. A Market Watch article noted that online alcohol sales increased 243% in the early portions of the pandemic.³ The reason for the increase is that people believe they need alcohol, either because they just cannot live without it or because they feel they cannot cope without it. Both are tragic.

The Church and Alcohol

The Church is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15), and it is our responsibility to spread the light of truth in the world and to confront sin and error in whatever form it may be found. Consequently, society’s alcohol plague should trigger a response, but what should it be?

We must recognize the serious nature of the problem. Alcohol is devastating to all who fall under its curse. The Bible is clear on this matter. Alcohol “enslaves the heart” (Hos. 4:11). It produces poverty (Pro. 23:21), shame and embarrassment (Pro. 20:1), and will cost one his soul (1 Cor. 6:10; Gal. 5:21). Solomon asked,

Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
Who has contentions? Who has complaints?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?

Those who linger long at the wine,
those who go in search of mixed wine
(Pro. 23:29-30).

The world glamorizes alcohol to try and hide its filth, but the reality is much more like what my family witnessed at a fast-food restaurant the day before Thanksgiving. As we were eating, a woman just a few feet away fell to the floor. Several rushed over to help her. At first, we thought she had suffered a stroke. She could not speak, she could not get up, and her facial expression never changed. But her young teenage son, with great embarrassment, told us she was drunk. The shame increased a short time later when she tried to kiss the man who was helping her to the car and could not stop telling him how much she loved him. How tragic that a young boy is forced to drive and watch over his own mother because her drunkenness renders her incapable of functioning. But this is just one small incident among thousands.

Throughout our world people are dying physically and spiritually because of alcohol. Marriages are torn apart. Children are neglected and abused. Individuals destroy their minds and bodies because of their addiction. There is nothing good or glamorous about alcohol at all. It is a toxic and destructive tool which the Devil uses with great success. God commands, “Do not look on the wine when

³ <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/us-alcohol-sales-spike-during-coronavirus-outbreak-2020-04-01>

it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly” (Pro. 23:31). Paul said, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation” (Eph. 5:18). Christians cannot be fooled into viewing alcohol nonchalantly, as if it is no big deal. We must see alcohol as the evil that it is.

Christians must stop arguing in favor of “social drinking.” Some within the body of Christ would agree with the previous point, but then say, “The Bible only condemns being drunk, not having a little wine on a special occasion.” The social drinking push by many is counterproductive and unbiblical for several reasons.

Consider the utter hypocrisy of the argument. How can a person stand completely opposed to drunkenness and all the carnage it produces, then support alcohol, even if it is on a “smaller” scale? Like it or not, “social drinking” is still drinking, and it is still participation in the same industry and culture that destroys people. How could you say anything about the dangers of alcohol when you engage in it yourself? Such is hypocritical and also self-defeating. You cannot claim to be walking in the light (1 John 1:7) and argue for the inclusion of darkness.

Why would a Christian want to drink alcohol at all? What is the motivation? The danger of alcohol is clear, and yet some Christians still argue in favor of it. Why? Actions proceed from the heart (Mark 7:14-15), and so there must be some driving force behind a Christian who argues in this

fashion. Is it a desire to be like the world? Is it a refusal to “condemn” friends or loved ones? Is it just that you *want* to drink socially, and so you refuse to believe there could be anything wrong with it? (If so, you still miss the point.) Things done with sinful motives are indeed sinful (Jas. 4:1-6).

Some social drinking arguments manifest a backwards view of Bible authority. Someone may respond, “I don’t see anything wrong with it, and you’re being too judgmental.” Okay, but do you see anything *right* with it? Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Can you point to a passage of scripture that authorizes drinking to any degree? Likely someone would say “Yes! First Timothy 5:23.” But that passage has no bearing here. Paul’s instructions to Timothy were in regard to medicinal needs; our discussion is about recreational drinking. No one who uses 1 Timothy 5:23 in favor of social drinking uses the passage correctly. You cannot transform a medicine passage into a sin passage.

Additionally, Romans 14:23 teaches an important principle. In the context of judgment matters Paul said, “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.” The principle is this – if I cannot say with certainty that God would be pleased with something, I have no business doing it. Our approach should be positive regarding authority. Meaning, I should ask “Is this right?” and

“Will God be pleased?” instead of saying “I just do not see anything wrong with it.”

Social drinking ignores the Bible’s command for sobriety and abstinence. First Peter 1:13 says, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” “‘Sobriety’ in ancient usage meant not only literal abstinence from drink but also behaving as a non-intoxicated person should, hence with dignified self-control.”⁴ The word indicates being completely free from intoxicants or anything else that would blur judgment and compromise our self-control. It is impossible to do that while drinking alcohol to any degree.

Further, Ephesians 5:18 commands, “And do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation.” The point of the passage is to not even begin the process of being drunk. Paul said, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:14). Who could argue that social drinking is not making provision for the flesh? We are to be holy as God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). We are called to come out of the world (2 Cor. 7:1) and be different (1 Pet. 2:9). It is impossible to fulfill those divine obligations while at the same time condoning or participating in something which God condemns.

The church must take an offensive approach toward the problem of alcohol. The Bible teaches us to expose the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). We should attack the problem head-on instead of waiting for it to come to us. Here are some suggestions.

We must be sure to preach and teach what the Bible says about alcohol and its dangers. The job of a preacher is to proclaim the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). This includes the Bible’s teaching on alcohol. The church must regularly hear God’s instruction on this important matter.

Preachers should be able to explain the pertinent passages clearly. We should be able to deal with the word “wine” in scripture and explain how it is used in its various contexts. Preachers should be able to present the Bible’s case against social drinking clearly so that hearers may understand and be able to reason through the issue clearly and biblically themselves. We must not have congregations of God’s people where mystery and ignorance abound concerning drinking.

In conjunction with the first point, we must be sure to teach our children clearly and comprehensively what the Bible says on the subject. The instruction of children is primarily the parent’s responsibility – not the church’s (Eph. 6:4). This implies that parents must learn God’s Word for themselves

⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1 Pe 1:13.

first (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5). Parents, look for teachable opportunities. If you are sitting at a restaurant and the table next to you is filled with rowdy drunks, take the opportunity to remind your children what God says about what they are seeing. Use family devotional time to read passages like Proverbs 23:29-32. Make passages like Ephesians 5:18 memory verses, and be sure your children understand what they mean and how they apply. Above all, do not treat alcohol as a subject full of question marks and non-consequence. Teach your children to see alcohol the way God does.

The church must work to provide support for individuals who are struggling emotionally and in other areas. Many people turn to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism. They often feel as if they have nowhere else to go. People are hurting and we have the one thing that can bring comfort – the gospel of Jesus Christ. God’s Word is all sufficient (2 Tim. 3:16) and gives us all we need (2 Pet. 1:3), even for our mental health (cf. Phil. 4:8; 2 Cor. 3:5; Mark 7:20-21; Pro. 4:23; 23:7). We should be mindful of those who are struggling and seek to help them. We should educate ourselves in ways to provide comfort and counsel. Perhaps by providing the emotional support that so many need, some plunges into alcoholism could be avoided.

We should do what we can to help those who are currently struggling with addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol use is currently on the rise. An already gargantuan problem is growing larger. More and more in our evangelistic efforts, we encounter those who are struggling with addiction and we must be equipped to help them.⁵ Overall, congregations of the church should place more emphasis in learning about addiction and how the Bible addresses it.

Conclusion

Alcohol is not a new problem, but one that COVID-19 has highlighted substantially. In fact, this pandemic has given attention to the fact that alcoholism and drug addiction is itself a pandemic in our country and in our world. The church cannot and must not stand on the sidelines while such a fire rages. As the army of God (Eph. 6:10-20), it is incumbent upon us to wage war against this evil. We cannot do so by taking a blasé approach toward it, by trying to argue that some alcohol consumption is okay, or by neglecting to teach and preach God’s decrees on the matter.

We must arm ourselves with the proper attitude and with a commitment to learning more about addiction, how to help those who struggle with it, and proclaiming to the world the truth about alcohol. May God help us to this end.

⁵ One way to do this is to support works like the *Home of Recovery and Restoration* (www.homeofrecovery.org). This is a work done by faithful members of the church in Winnsboro, Texas, which seeks to help men overcome addiction. The problem with so many addiction recovery programs is that they are

emotionally based and lack the proper substance to sustain a person after the emotion is gone. Therefore, the goal of the *Home of Recovery* is to provide substantial instruction from God’s Word which will stand as a solid permanent foundation.

Gospel Advocate vs. Firm Foundation (Re-Baptism)

Jackson W. Erwin

“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor. 16:13-14).

These words resonate soundly with the sharp disputes that occurred in the church from the 19th to the early 20th century. When brethren disagreed, they made their arguments clear, authoritative, and known. However, this was mostly done, not in a manner of envy or hatred, but out of a sincere love for the word of God and its followers. While it is a stark contrast to many discussions today, nonetheless it portrays the manner of debate among some of the greatest leaders of the Restoration Movement.

The subject of re-baptizing those who were previously immersed for reasons other than the forgiveness of sins was discussed between Alexander Campbell and John Thomas in the mid-19th century. In the late-19th century, the issue was discussed in two of the most influential papers of the last century, the *Firm Foundation* and the *Gospel Advocate*. Those primarily involved in this discussion were the *Foundation*'s J.D. Tant and Austin McGary and the *Advocate*'s James Harding and David Lipscomb.

The Firm Foundation

In fact, the *Firm Foundation* was primarily created as a rebuttal to the *Advocate*'s position on re-baptism. It was established in 1884 by Austin McGary, just three years after his baptism into Christ by Harry Hamilton. The first article to appear in the *Firm Foundation* dealt with the subject it was created to oppose and was entitled “Campbellism—What is It?”¹

In the article, McGary contended that Campbellism, a title wrongfully given to those in the Restoration Movement by its enemies, was not the appeal to return to New Testament Christianity. It was not the appeal that faith is the first step towards salvation since the Bible teaches it. It was not the call of sinners to repentance because Holy Writ also declares this truth. Nor was it Campbellism to teach that baptism is for the remission of sins because this was the teaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost.

Campbellism in its very form, according to McGary, was the belief that one could be baptized without realizing that such an action was for the forgiveness of sins and still have it be accepted by God. This, according to Campbell, meant that those immersed

¹ Austin McGary, “Campbellism—What is It?” *Firm Foundation* 1 (September 1884): 3-5.

in water as believers did not need to be re-baptized due to their newfound understanding that baptism was in order to obtain remission. In other words, according to Campbellism, it was the act of baptism that was important and not a complete understanding for the act.

1890 marked the beginning of an exchange of articles between Lipscomb and McGary on this crucial subject.² This series of five articles was placed under the title “What Shall I Do to Be Saved?” and was first announced in April 1890. Lipscomb was open to publishing McGary’s responses, as the first of these appeared in the October edition of the *Advocate*. McGary made his position clear when he wrote,

While it is not our position that man must understand “all the promises, compass all the blessings contained in the promises of God or connected with the least service God requires at our hands,” we do hold that the sinner, before he is baptized “into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” must hear, understand and believe that teaching included in that part of the commission.³

One of McGary’s core arguments came from the way God requires men and women to obey the commandments of the New Covenant. Referencing Jeremiah 31 and how the new law

would be written on the heart, and how Paul in Romans 6:17 said that the church obeyed “from the heart” the gospel (i.e. baptism), he argued:

But a law cannot be written in the mind or heart, nor obeyed *from the heart* or mind till it is understood by the heart. Hence, we hear the Savior saying to those who were not prepared to follow him: “This people’s *heart* is waxed gross, and their *ears are dull of hearing*, and their *eyes they have closed*; lest at any time they should *see with their eyes and hear with their ears* (the eyes and ears of their understanding) and should *understand with their heart*, and should be converted (or turned) and I should heal them.” Matt. xiii: 15. So we see he puts *seeing, hearing and understanding with the heart*, before healing or forgiveness of sins. And then, to put the truth clear beyond the reach of all the speculations of men who imagine themselves wise above that which is written, our Lord said: “But he that received seed (gospel truth) into the good ground is he that heareth the word and *understandeth it*.”⁴

McGary also had encounters with James Harding on the issue of re-

² Earl I. West, *The Life and Times of David Lipscomb* (Henderson, TN: Religious Book Service, 1954), 225.

³ Austin McGary, “What Shall I Do to Be Saved?” *Gospel Advocate* 32 (October 1890): 696.

⁴ *Ibid.* 696.

baptism.⁵ The discussion was of such tremendous interest among the church that a discussion between the two pioneers was put in a tract and advertised in both the *Advocate* and the *Foundation*.⁶

The Gospel Advocate

Lipscomb, on the other hand, agreed with Campbell. Like Campbell, Lipscomb saw the issue of re-baptism as unimportant and did not understand why the *Firm Foundation* placed such an emphasis on it. Lipscomb, in response to an article submitted by McGary, wrote, “We do not think a discussion of the question of re-baptism of much profit, from the fact that the question at issue is always assumed, and the brethren look at it wholly from a prejudged standpoint.”⁷

He referred to it as “McGary’s hobby”⁸ and saw his own stance on the matter as clear. To Lipscomb, “they who obey God to the letter of his law shall be saved or pardoned, whether they know just at what point God pardons or not. Commands belong to us to obey. Promises belong to God to fulfill.”⁹

Therefore, Lipscomb considered any man or woman who was immersed simply in order to obey the commands

of God as a born-again Christian. When Baptists or immersed Methodists desired to join one of their congregations, Lipscomb, along with a host of other brethren, would accept their baptism as valid since they obeyed God “to the letter of his law” and were thus already “saved or pardoned.” He saw such people as erring Christians in need of being taught the word of God more accurately.

Lipscomb believed that if God required His creation to understand the exact purposes of His commands, no one could truly be a valid candidate for baptism. He wrote, “If we must understand all the fruits, results, benefits, that God intends to bestow in and through baptism, before it is acceptable, neither Bro. McGary nor myself are yet fit subjects for baptism, nor was Tolbert Fanning or A. Campbell at their death.”¹⁰

Despite his efforts to remain as silent as possible on the issue, desiring to focus on matters he believed were more pressing, the popularity of the subject and the well-reasoned arguments of the *Foundation* eventually prompted Lipscomb to write a series of articles defending his position. As already stated, these articles fell under the title “What Shall I Do to Be

⁵ David Lipscomb, “Dear Bro. McQuiddy,” *Gospel Advocate* 27 (November 1885): 726.

⁶ David Lipscomb, “Miscellaneous,” *Gospel Advocate* 30 (December 1888): 826.

⁷ David Lipscomb, “Re-baptism,” *Gospel Advocate* 26 (January 1884): 6.

⁸ David Lipscomb, “Valid Baptism,” *Gospel Advocate* 27 (July 1885): 418.

⁹ *Ibid.* 418.

¹⁰ David Lipscomb, “Re-Baptism,” *Gospel Advocate* 26 (January 1884): 7.

Saved?"¹¹ and simply re-explained his positions in a more comprehensive manner.

In those articles, Lipscomb also answered some false claims McGary had made about his positions and cleared up many misunderstandings between the two preachers. Showing brotherly character, Lipscomb allowed McGary to write a response to those five articles. McGary then referred to Lipscomb as "the strongest man in our ranks," recognizing the tremendous efforts he put forth to spread the borders of the kingdom.

The *Advocate* had some writers, however, who disagreed with Lipscomb on the conditions of rebaptism. E.G. Sewell was one of these individuals. In his and Lipscomb's *Questions Answered*, Sewell explained his position on re-baptism. Responding to a question as to how he would proceed if a Baptist desired fellowship based upon their Baptist baptism, he stated that he would only accept their baptism if (1) it was done for the remission of sins, or (2) it was done to obey the teaching of the Bible. However, if they believed they were saved before they were baptized, he would try to teach them more on that matter. Sewell wrote:

But I have often found persons coming forward at my invitations to unite with the brethren at that

place on the Bible; and if I had not already been informed as to how they stood, I would ask them if they wished to be baptized; and if they said no, that they had been baptized, immersed, then I would ask them if, when they were baptized, they did it as a matter of submission to the will and requirements of God; and if they said yes, that was an end to it, and they were received by that congregation as Christians... But if one should make the claim of conversion as those Baptists put it of whom you speak in the above, that he was saved before baptism and then baptized because he was already saved, then I would teach him the Lord's will more perfectly.¹²

To Sewell, the only true "re-baptism" was baptizing someone who was already immersed for the forgiveness of sins. Any other form of baptism, such as it being an outward sign of inward grace, was not a true baptism to begin with. But, if there was any denominational member who had heard the teachings of the Restorers and believed that baptism was for the forgiveness of sins while in a denomination, and were baptized for that reason, then Sewell would accept them into the fellowship of believers when desired. He says:

¹¹ David Lipscomb, "News and Notes," *Gospel Advocate* 32 (April 1890).

¹² David Lipscomb and Elisha G. Sewell, *Questions Answered* (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Co., 1921), 52.

But the sort of persons that come to unite with us on the Bible have already learned what we teach as to faith, repentance, and baptism as conditions of pardon, and had somehow learned before they were baptized that it was required by God that they should do that and did it to his will; and such as these are about the only kind that want to unite with Christians on the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. Now, when the rebaptists require such as these to be baptized again, they are practicing rebaptism without the shadow of a doubt; for such as these have already obeyed the gospel, have done the things the gospel requires people to do, and did them because they were anxious to do God's will. Now, these are the characters that no man on earth has any divine right to require to be baptized again.¹³

As for James Harding, he firmly stood on the same grounds as Lipscomb. When asked whether "Baptists baptize people right," his faith on the matter was clear. He wrote:

God ordained baptism that through it he might bring the believers into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...The purpose man should have in view should be to obey God, to submit to him, to do his will, that being led by him, he may receive the blessings of the

Father. If Baptists baptize believers, they baptize them right. If a man is baptized by a Baptist because he trusts in Christ and wishes to obey him, he is baptized right with the proper view in mind.¹⁴

Like Lipscomb, Harding did not consider infant baptism, sprinkling, or pouring baptism at all—given that biblical baptism is the immersion of believers in water. Therefore, anyone who was baptized as an infant, or who was baptized by means other than immersion, was not held in consideration of this question. They had to be baptized in the way prescribed by Scripture.

J.D. Tant would later become a writer and Field Editor for the *Advocate* in 1895, yet his position never changed on the validity of Baptist baptism. Lipscomb explained this in the first issue of the paper, writing:

It is not understood by his taking position with us that he agrees with all the positions of the *Advocate*. Neither do we ask this. It is not to be expected that men who think for themselves will agree about all matters of opinion. But it is different as to matters of faith. In this we see eye to eye and speak the same things. We all teach faith, repentance, and baptism in order to the remission of sins. We cannot see how

¹³ Ibid. 52.

¹⁴ James Harding, "Scraps," *Gospel Advocate* 28 (December 1886): 802.

a man who is loyal to the truth can do otherwise.¹⁵

Conclusion

The issue brought forth by these brethren demonstrates three things the church must learn as a whole if there is going to be any effort to grow and work together. First, it is essential for Christians to discuss doctrinal differences with one another to discover the truth of God's word. If we simply hide these problems "under the rug," then we cannot teach and admonish each other in the way God desires.

Second, the differences among us should not always ruin our view of each other. As humans, we are constantly learning and constantly wrong.

Rather than demanding others to accept our position on oftentimes hard questions, we must have patience and humility to find, and help them to find, the truth.

Third, if we war against ourselves on areas of opinion or ignorance, we will significantly harm our chances in winning souls to Christ. Our unity upon the Bible and respect for one another is the evidence of our discipleship (Jn. 13:35). Arrogance, division, wrath, and pride, however, evidence sin's presence. The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20). As the saying goes, "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. But in all things, love."

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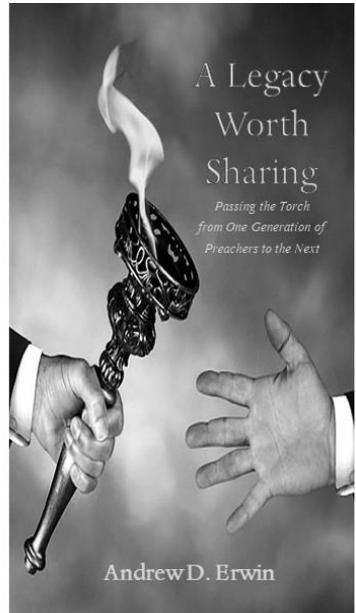
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¹⁵ David Lipscomb, "Another Worker," *Gospel Advocate* 37 (January 1895): 37.

Profit from the Misery of Others

Johnny O. Trail

Much of what motivates people from antiquity and in our postmodern world is the love of money. Scripture teaches that the “love of money” is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). From what one observes, this is an undeniable fact that is confirmed by God’s word. Some people love money to the extent that they are inclined to engage in abhorrent practices to obtain additional wealth.

There is an instance of this found in the book of Acts. A girl possessed with a demonic spirit was following Paul and making comments about the nature of his ministry. Perhaps to avert being accused of being in league with demons, Paul cast the spirit of divination out of the girl. Luke records this occurrence in Acts 16:16-19. “Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.”

When the owners of this girl learned that their “profit” was forever gone, Paul and Silas became the focus of their anger and revenge. Acts 16:22 says, “Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods.” This excessive response is not remarkable in a pagan culture that utilized her for divination.

These passages do not divulge how long the slave girl had been possessed, but scripture portrays demon possession as being exceptionally detrimental (cf. Mark 5:1-5). Most compassionate people are outraged to learn that a person in misery is being placed in that position so others can turn a profit from it. The situation mentioned in Acts sixteen fits this description because her masters were distraught about losing their profits.

Sadly, many in our contemporary society profit from the misery of others. Popular culture and media outlets do not portray the evils that plague our society in this fashion, but a quick examination of the facts underscores at least one glaring fact. The love of money is what motivates a significant amount of the abominable things that happen in our world today.

Abortion is a multibillion-dollar industry. “Its combined annual revenue is \$1.3 billion, including approximately \$530 million in government

funding such as Medicaid reimbursements.”¹ Sadly, our government funds abortions in our nation and in foreign countries as well through our tax dollars. Since 1973 our nation has aborted over sixty million babies. Most of this is done under the guise of “birth control,” but those who provide the abortion make profits from their clients.

Along these lines, most people who follow the atrocity of abortions are aware of Kermit Gosnell. Mr. Gosnell made significant amounts of money from his practice. One source avers, “It was also claimed that Gosnell charged \$1,600-\$3,000 for each late-term abortion and made \$10,000-\$15,000 per day from the clinic.”² Why were these atrocities committed? These abortions were performed in abysmal conditions (too disgusting to mention here) for the promise of money.

Furthermore, research and use of fetal materials extracted from abortion procedures causes a significant amount of money to change hands.³ The

National Institute of Health spent seventy-six million dollars to fund this research in 2015. This would include children who were the victims of an “elective” abortion. Certain legalities apply to these considerations, but the NIH policy does allow for this type of research.⁴ Regardless of what Planned Parenthood may (or may not) make off these specimens, research conducted on aborted babies should concern Christians.

Pornography is an extremely lucrative business in our world.⁵ Pornography promises no consequences in the face of sexual behaviors that can lead one to perdition. This is a lie! While some call the use of these materials “victimless,” they do not consider the lives that have been destroyed for this lustful pursuit. Additionally, most people do not realize that the pornography industry funds and supplies materials for abortions. If one thinks about the link between the two, it makes perfect sense.⁶ One imagines that if more

¹ Janell Ross, “How Planned Parenthood Actually Uses its Federal Funding,” *The Washington Post*, August 14, 2015. While researching the amount of money that Planned Parenthood makes, some of the webpages that were listed in Google search were unreachable. This is why a 2015 article is used.

² “Doctor Allegedly Killed Babies with Scissors,” (2011). Doctor Allegedly Killed Babies with Scissors - Philadelphia News, Weather and Sports from WTXF FOX 29 (archive.org)

³ Merideth Wadman, “The Truth About Fetal Tissue Research,” *Nature*, 2015. The Truth about Fetal Tissue Research - Scientific American. “The figures show that in

2014, the NIH funded 164 projects using the tissue, at a cost of \$76 million.”

⁴ 4.1.14 Human Fetal Tissue Research (nih.gov).

⁵ How is the Porn Industry Worth Billions of Dollars?” *Fight the New Drug*, 2019. How is the Porn Industry Worth Billions of Dollars? (fightthenewdrug.org) “A recent article published by business news site, Quartz, tends to agree. The article places the industry’s value at anywhere between \$6 billion and \$97 billion, with the more realistic estimates ranging from \$6 billion to \$15 billion.

⁶ Perry West, “Why a Porn Magnate Funds an International Abortion Agency,” *CNA*, 2020. Why a porn magnate funds an

people realized the connection between these two reprobate practices, they would stop the practice.

Alcohol sales are very profitable in our age.⁷ The amount of tax revenue that our nation receives from sales of various alcoholic beverages is staggering.⁸ Never mind the homes that are destroyed by alcohol addiction. Do not think about the number of people who are abused by people under the influence of alcohol. Do not consider the people who are injured and killed by drunk drivers every year. Commercials never portray the dark underbelly of alcohol abuse, just the “fun” that people who consume the product seem to have.

Human trafficking has become a lucrative business in our age. Some sources say that \$150 billion per year are made in human trafficking rings.⁹ Sadly, slavery was not completely ended near the close of the U.S. Civil war. There is a renewed fear surrounding our children and the safety of adults who are sometimes taken in by those engaged in human trafficking. If you have not read the facts and figures surrounding this evil, you need to familiarize yourself with them.

The love of money propels much of the wickedness we see in our world today. Hopefully, Christians know that money is temporary in nature and not the ultimate pursuit in this life. Luke 16:13-14 says, “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.’ Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.”



international abortion agency (catholic-newsagency.com).

⁷ Daniela Coppola, “Total alcoholic beverage sales in the U.S. 2006-2019” *Statista*, 2020. <http://www.Statista> “In 2019, alcoholic beverage sales in the United States reached approximately 252.82 billion U.S. dollars.”

⁸“Alcohol plays an enormous role in our economy. In the U.S. alone, the alcohol

beverage industry is responsible for sustaining more than 4 million jobs and generating almost \$70 billion in annual tax revenue.”

⁹ Carmen Niethammer, “Cracking the \$150 Billion Business of Human Trafficking”, *Forbes*, 2020. Cracking The \$150 Billion Business Of Human Trafficking (forbes.com)

The Inspiration of the Bible (1)

The Old Testament

Andy Erwin

J.W. McGarvey has well-said, “Everything that is properly styled ‘Christian’ owes its existence to the belief in the divine origin and authority of the Bible.”¹ The Bible is a divine product, produced through the instrumentality of men. It transcends the activities of the human beings who wrote it. These men were divinely inspired by the Spirit of God. By virtue of this inspiration the Bible is “God-breathed.”² It is divinely authoritative, infallible, and trustworthy.

“The inspiration of the Scripture implies that God may be encountered in the words of Scripture. Since Scripture is the word of God, the ultimate goal of interpretation is primarily encounter with God rather than encounter with the human writers of the biblical texts.”³

Cottrell has provided a good explanation for the influence called “inspiration.” He states that inspiration is “when God exerts a power or an

influence upon a person (spokesman) in a way that guarantees that what he says will be what God wants him to say.”⁴

Verbal Inspiration

The process of inspiration which was employed is often called “verbal inspiration.” “‘Verbal inspiration’ affirms that the influence of God’s Spirit over the content of Scripture cannot be limited to ideas or doctrines but extends to the smallest units of meaning.”⁵

The Bible is the product of both verbal and “plenary” inspiration, meaning that the divine inspiration of the Bible extends equally to all its parts. Thus, as men were writing the Scriptures, they were writing under the divine influence of the Holy Spirit. Men wrote as God inspired them to write. The Holy Spirit guided the apostles and writers of the New Testament just as He guided the prophets and writers of the

¹ In J.W. McGarvey’s classic sermon on “The Inspiration of the Bible,” in *McGarvey’s Sermons* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publications, 1999), 1-15, he lists five earmarks of inspiration. (1) Impartiality; (2) Consistent emotions; (3) Brevity; (3) Infallibility; and (5) Power to convict men of sin and to reform lives.

² *θεόπνευστος* – breathed out by God (ESV); God breathed (NIV)

³ E.J. Schnabel, “Scripture,” *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 41.

⁴ Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All: Biblical Doctrine for Today* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 50.

⁵ Schnabel, *NDBT*, p 41.

Old Testament (John 14:26, 15:26-27, 16:13; 1 Cor 2:10-13; 1 Pet 1:10-12; 2 Pet 1:19-20).

The foundation for a document being included in the Bible (i.e., canonicity) is inspiration. That God spoke to man, and that the Scriptures claim to be the record of His communication with man, is an evident fact clearly demonstrated by even a casual reading of the Book itself.

The Bible began when God spoke to Moses (Exod. 20:1). Moses then “wrote all the words of the Lord” (Exod. 24:4). God spoke and man wrote (cf. Deut. 5:22). From their very inception, these writings were set apart from all the other writings of Israel, as they were kept in the Tabernacle along with the Ark of the Covenant. These writings were revered and read before the people as the being word of God (see Josh. 8:25).

Revered as God’s Word

Once a book was finished, that book could not be added unto or taken from (Deut. 4:2). The instruction contained therein was to be kept without variance to the right or to the left (Deut. 28:14). Once a book was completed, all of Israel would have known it was completed, it would have been read to them as instruction given by God and would have been kept separately from other writings (thus canonized) and sanctified in their hearts, not being added to or taken from, but decreed to be reverently obeyed.

A Collection of Scripture

The stream of God’s divine revelation is explained as, “Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little” (Isa. 28:10, 13). In Hebrews it is revealed that God spoke at “various times and in different ways...to the fathers by the prophets” (Heb. 1:1). God did not reveal the entirety of His will in the Old Testament (or in the New Testament for that matter) at one setting or to one person.

When we come to the book of Joshua, we find Joshua adding his writings to the “Book of the Law of God” (Josh. 24:26). We also find Samuel writing his words on a scroll and laying it before the Lord (1 Sam. 10:25). In these instances, we can see the process of divine revelation and correspondingly the process of canonization continuing to develop and continuing to be acknowledged by the people.

No councils were held, no centuries passed, no redactors were needed, and no doubt existed in the minds of the people as to what was in fact the word of God. Joshua and Samuel added these writings to the already existing collection as they finished them.

A similar thought is found in Daniel’s reference to Jeremiah’s prophecies (Dan. 9:2). By the reign of the first year of Darius, Jeremiah’s prophecies had already been included in the “books” and were being studied by Daniel just as he studied the writings of the Law of Moses (Dan. 9:11). Again,

no centuries passed, no redactors were needed, and no doubt existed as to its place alongside the other “books” in the law of God.

God spoke to man. Man wrote by the Spirit of God the words of God to be preserved for their posterity to follow (cf. Deut. 6:7). As God spoke at various times to different men, and as their writings were finished and published to the people (cf. Deut. 31:24 ff.), these newest books were collected alongside the older ones, forming an ever-increasing collection of divinely inspired literature. As we have noted, it did not take years for these books to gain approval among the people. Instead, the faithful in Israel accepted their validity and considered them to be Scripture on the basis of their author, content, and claim. Also consider the scribes who meticulously copied the Old Testament letter for letter. Can we not see that these men knew and believed they were copying the word of God?

A Closed Canon

Once God’s stream of divine revelation ceased flowing, the collection of canonical books ceased growing. Thus, you have a “once closed, always closed” canon of the Old Testament.

With Moses we can see the obvious beginning of the Old Testament canon (Deut. 31:9-13). The Law was believed and attested by Israel from that day onward to be an inspired writing, or Scripture. The book of the Law would be preached, consulted, and revered

among the people. It was revered before captivity by Joshua, during captivity by Daniel, and after the captivity by Ezra.

Ezra saw to it that it was read before the remnant of Israel and possibly had his part in adding to the canon himself. The writings of leaders like Joshua, David, and Solomon (cf. 1 Kgs. 11:41) would be added to Moses’ books and accepted equally as Scripture. As the Old Testament developed, prophets arose, and their writings were added to the already existing collection of Scripture.

Thirty-Nine Books

By the time of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (c. 37 AD-100 AD), the contents and limits of the Old Testament seem to be quite clear. Josephus provided a list of twenty-two books (some lists have twenty-four because of Jeremiah and Lamentations being separated as well as Judges and Ruth) comprising the Hebrew Bible. He stated that the Hebrew Bible fell into three categories – the five books of Moses, thirteen books of the prophets and history, and four books of psalms and precepts.

The order he gave became recognized during the inter-testament period. When we look more closely, we will find that these twenty-two books are exactly what we find in our thirty-nine-volume edition of the Old Testament in the English Bible.

The five books of Moses are the same. So too are the four books of psalms and precepts – these being Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. However, in the thirteen books of the prophets and history of Israel, we find a variation from the English Old Testament.

In the Hebrew Bible Josephus regarded as the Old Testament, Judges and Ruth were combined into one book. 1 & 2 Samuel were one book. 1 & 2 Kings were one book. 1 & 2 Chronicles were also combined into one book. Jeremiah and Lamentations were one book. The twelve “minor” prophets were combined into one book. So too were Ezra and Nehemiah combined into one book. Thus, the thirteen books in Josephus’ “prophets and history” have become thirty books in our Old Testament. Therefore, his count of twenty-two books has become thirty-nine for us, while still consisting of the same books. Moreover, Josephus reported that the books he listed were accepted as Scripture and were so unanimously received by all Jews that they would contend for them to the death, and that none dared even

to increase, diminish, or change them (*Against Apion 1:8*).⁶

The Apocrypha

Should we include the “Alexandrian canon” of the Old Testament, which contains the fourteen apocryphal books? The evidence for such a canon is apparently lacking. Philo (first-century AD), who quoted frequently from the Old Testament as the word of God and was an Alexandrian himself, never believed the Apocrypha to be inspired or even quoted from it. Furthermore, Aquila’s Greek Version (second-century AD) was accepted by Alexandrian Jews and did it not include these books. We point these facts out simply to show that the canon of the Old Testament recognized during the first century was not merely “Palestinian” but was universally accepted among the Jews and early Christians alike.

Some scholars maintain that a council of rabbis held at Jamnia in 90 AD is responsible for the Old Testament canon. We reject this assertion mainly because it would have left Christ and the apostles in the dark pertaining to

⁶ Also consider that Josephus was not crying out for the inclusion or exclusion of any of the fourteen apocryphal books from the “Alexandrian Canon” into the Old Testament canon. Neither was there an outcry for the books called “apocryphal” from the Jewish kinsmen of his day. Had these books been included without deserving inclusion, surely an outcry for them to be excluded would have been heard. Had they been excluded while deserving to be

included, surely an outcry would have been heard for their inclusion. The fact that a few scrolls from among the Essenes were discovered does not an outcry make, nor a re-writing of history warrant. In fact, the Fourth Qumran Cave has also yielded such artifacts as fragments and scrolls of various pseudepigraphical works, but no one can seriously suggest that the Essenes possessed them because they believe these writings were inspired of God.

the Old Testament. However, more impressive and authoritative than anything else on this subject is the record of the Son of God. Jesus said nothing about these apocryphal writings. This is not because He did not know or care about the canon. On the contrary, He confronted the Pharisees for adding to the word. He confronted the Sadducees for taking from the word.

Our Lord spoke of the law, prophets, and psalms (Luke 24:44) and thus recognized the tripartite division of the Hebrew Bible.⁷ He said, “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He also agreed with the arrangement and thus the number of Old Testament books accepted by the Jews when He spoke of “the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel (found in the first book of the Hebrew Bible – Genesis) to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (found in the last book of the Hebrew Bible – The Chronicles)” (Matt 23:35). By saying from Abel to

Zechariah, Jesus was saying from the beginning to the end of the Old Testament as the Jews recognized it.⁸

While some question why Jesus did not confront the issue of these apocryphal books, we maintain that it was because there was *no* issue concerning these books. Had these books belonged and been excluded from the canon, Jesus would have said to include them. Had these books been included and not belonged in the canon, He would have said to reject them. The fact that He was silent proves that these books were right where they needed to be. They were neither inspired books needing acceptance nor were they uninspired books needing removal from the canon. They were what they are today – uninspired books kept out of the canon of the Old Testament and understood as being merely books written by men. If Jesus did not accept them, neither should we. If the apostles did not argue for their inclusion, neither should we.⁹

⁷ The Psalms would have been the first book in that division of Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. By saying, “Psalms,” Jesus was referring to the whole of that particular group of books.

⁸ Some will contend that the Zechariah of 2 Chronicles 24:20-22 was the son of Jehoida, while the Zechariah of Matthew 23:35 was the son of Barachias, thus inferring that this were two different men. However, this inference is not a necessary one. For instance, Jehoida, who was 130 years old when he died (2 Chronicles 24:15), could have been the name of his grandfather. Also, it could be that the names of

Barachias and Jehoida were used interchangeably. A third possibility is that the phrase “son of Barachias” does not belong in the text, but was later added by a copyist. Each of these three possibilities seems plausible.

⁹ In as far as manuscript evidence for the apocryphal books is concerned, the earliest known Greek manuscripts of the Bible which contain the Apocrypha are 4th century AD and later. None of the earliest manuscripts which contain them contain all the apocryphal books. Only four of these books are common to all.

In fact, there is reason to doubt whether such a council at Jamnia ever took place. Truly the idea of Jamnia is itself “apocryphal” or “doubtful.” As Jack Lewis stated, Jamnia “appears to be one of those things that has come to be true due to frequent repetition of the assertion rather than to its being actually supported by the evidence.”¹⁰

Walter Kaiser states, “It is amazing how often scholars have cited each other with assurance that this Council in AD 90 settled the extent of the OT canon.”¹¹ R.K. Harrison believed, “it is far from certain that there ever was a Council or Synod of Jamnia in the strictest sense.”¹² He continued by stating that very little is known about the facts of the supposed council and whether or not the participants were even concerned about whether there should be more books included in the canon. He also adds that no formal announcement was ever made in the rabbinic circles at Jamnia pertaining to the canon.¹³

The fact remains that there is not any more evidence for including these books today than there was two thousand years ago. The hypothesis that the canon of the Old Testament was not

closed by the time of Christ is unmerited, unwarranted, and unnecessary.

When Jesus sat in His hometown synagogue of Nazareth and opened the scroll of Isaiah, He *knew* He was reading the words of His Father. When He said the Spirit spoke by the mouth of David, He *knew* this had occurred, and was recorded in the Scriptures. How could Jesus have said, “Search the scriptures” if the “scriptures” did not yet exist? That this is even a discussion among biblical scholars is alarming. Are we honestly to believe that Jesus did not know which books belonged and which ones did not?

As we have said before, if this had been an issue during His ministry, He would have doubtlessly addressed it. The fact that He did not address the issue of the inclusion of these books only serves to prove our point that this was not a relevant issue to Christ or the apostles.



¹⁰ Jack P. Lewis, “What Do We Mean by Jabneh?” *Journal of the Bible and Religion* 32 (1964): 132.

¹¹ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 38.

¹² R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 277.

¹³ Harrison, 278-279.