

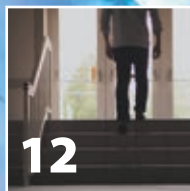
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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

Convergence

Convergence



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Our sincere thanks to Dr. John Vaughn for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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Convergence

In early 2010 an article by Ben Wright appeared on the 9marks.org website titled, “An Evangelical Fundamentalist Convergence?” Pastor Wright saw hope in such a convergence, but we use it here with little optimism. After all, “convergence” is the antonym of separation. The antonym is needed now to avoid the confusion resulting from the lack of a clear term when striving to understand what is likely a new movement. For example, some just call the Convergents “Calvinists,” as if their recent identification with Calvinism were the root of all choices that separatists find objectionable. Others use the unhelpful phrase “these young guys,” as though younger Convergents consistently move away from separatism just because they are young.

Nevertheless, something is going on—something that looks very much like the self-styled “Neo-Evangelicalism” of sixty years ago; something that in its efforts to engage the culture seems to be, again, embracing the culture. Therein lies the danger of the pursuit of relevance as an end in itself. In seeking to stay in touch with the ever-changing culture, churches can think themselves separate from it while moving away from their moorings. They can soon occupy the space that belonged to the world not long ago, no longer secure on the foundations on which they were built.

This issue of *FrontLine* offers an appeal for wisdom, discernment, and caution in this regard. It is not addressed just to those who have rejected separatism in favor of convergence nor to those who have never been separatists so much as to separatists seeking answers—those who are resisting pressure to conform their ministries to this movement. However, if anything in this issue comes as a rebuke to those who are dividing their churches over changes they promised not to make when they were called, or to those who have brought their churches to the brink of ruin with premature change, we pray it will be taken as a loving rebuke to be considered carefully.

The following articles are offered to encourage readers in their understanding of the specific topics addressed. Some deal with the positions the Convergents themselves held to without apology until

recently. The first article, by Dr. Mike Harding, reviews the fact that “The Scriptures Are the Final Authority for Belief and Behavior.” Behavior is the tip of the iceberg, but the “dignity of its movement,” as one author put it, is due to what is under the surface: belief and biblical truth. Dr. Harding explains that biblical applications for life are not inherently legalistic. The claim that we should not teach what is not specifically stated in the Bible, is not specifically stated in the Bible. In contrast, Dr. Harding reviews the principles on which we base biblical decisions for all of life.

The second article is presented as a question-and-answer interview gleaned from personal conversations and correspondence with the Editor initiated by students, singles, young couples, and senior citizens who have felt driven from their churches by Convergents. As with all authors writing for *FrontLine*, the Editor takes full responsibility for the content of articles appearing over his name.

Next, a provocative article by Pastor Daniel Unruh addresses the dilemma of those who are trying to explain “Why I Left my Fundamental Church.” This pointed article is included not only to provide wise counsel for vulnerable, trusting believers but also to those who have had to leave their churches because of Convergence. Then, the ever important question of music is addressed again by *FrontLine* as veteran music pastor Dr. Tim Fisher and *FrontLine* editor Dr. John Vaughn revisit their well-known principles and personal observations published elsewhere over the last twenty years. Their article, “Approving Things That Are Excellent,” adds unapologetic opinion on the controversial and divisive topic of Sovereign Grace Music, increasingly used by Fundamentalists—almost militantly so by Convergents.

An important article by Dr. Kevin Schaal on “Leading a Congregation Ethically through Change” offers transparent and humble encouragement on the right way for pastors and other leaders to achieve ministry progress without driving a church prematurely into progressive positions and practices against their will or understanding. And the closing article is taken with permission from Dr. Randy Jaeggli’s book on beverage alcohol, *Christians and Alcohol—A Scriptural Case for Abstinence*. Specifically, we are reprinting the Preface by Dr. Steve Hankins and the Introduction by Dr. Jaeggli. We encourage every reader to obtain and study this book.

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As an advocate of evangelism, I am concerned that some of the views of Creationists (both *Old Earth Only* and *Young Earth Only*) hinder many sincere thinkers from believing the Bible. There is a third position that encourages faith in God's Word—that of *Old and Young Earth*. [The reader then provides brief arguments for the Gap Theory. Ed.]

Just think of the good that would result if Creationists could agree. It would bring unity among believers in this matter and could remove the barrier that keeps sincere students from believing the Bible.

Jonathan Musch
Brighton, MI

Thanks again for your dedication to the Lord and your ministry in FBFI and *FrontLine* magazine. God bless you. I, as others I have recently talked with, am increasingly concerned about the disappointing, yet predictable, movement of some Fundamental brethren veering to the left. We simply must rejoice in the Lord in personal daily worship, and be as steadfast as possible until the Lord calls us home. Keep up the good work. Surely Jesus will come soon.

Mitch Sidles
Westminster, CO

Our church, Agnew Road Baptist Church in Greenville, is planning a trip to Israel through Shalom Ministries, June 18–30, 2017. You had mentioned there is no FBFI pastors' tour scheduled for several years, but occasionally you get inquiries from churches about wanting to send their pastors. We have a small group, so we would love to have you share our tour dates with others who may want to go.

Debbie and Pastor Jeff Miller
Agnew Road Baptist Church

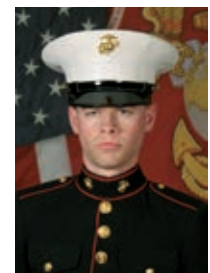
[Interested parties may contact FrontLine at info@fbfi.org for additional information. Ed.]

Recently I listened to a message preached by [one of your authors] from 1 Corinthians 13, about how we dress appropriately for the occasion because of our love for others. People often dress too casually for church, passing it off by saying, "That's me; that's just the way I am," etc. The sermon reminded me that how we dress for church is an important part of worship and showing people that we indeed think it is a *worship* service. It makes a loud and clear statement about what kind of event we are participating in by the way we dress. I hope we can do a full issue on the topic of worship.

A long-time reader
Taylors, SC

Dear FBFI Chaplaincy,

Please find enclosed monies donated in memory of my late son, LCpl. Ryan Scheer. Ryan was an active-duty Marine. He was between duty stations, on leave, when the accident that killed him occurred. We will greatly miss him but know that he is well in the arms of our Lord and that we will see Ryan again someday soon. Since Ryan was a Christian and a Marine, we sought a charity that would honor Christ and help the military as well. The Lord laid on our heart your ministry. We trust that these monies will be put to good use to spread the gospel to the mission field of our armed forces. Our prayers are with you all.



Ken and Pam Scheer

Memorial Gifts Received as of August 19, 2016

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The Believer's Certainty



Behavior

Beliefs

Biblical Truth

Paul declares that all Scripture is “profitable” or “useful” (*ōphélimos*; 2 Tim. 3:16) in the sense of yielding a practical benefit (1 Tim. 4:8; Titus 3:8). This benefit is delineated in four phrases.¹ These phrases are arranged in two pairs, each with a negative and positive aspect. The first pair of words deals with belief (creed) and the second pair with behavior (conduct). The Scriptures are for teaching the truth and refuting error—our belief. The Scriptures are also profitable for reforming one’s actions and discipline in right living—our behavior.

The Scriptures Construct Our Faith by Establishing Correct Belief

The Word of God benefits believers by supplying the absolute truth-deposit from which Christians are taught

the propositional truth-claims of God (*pròs didaskalían*, “for doctrine”; 2 Tim. 3:16). The Scriptures teach by means of setting forth the whole counsel of God, which is the systematic, unified, non-contradictory body of truth inscripturated in the Bible. Sound doctrine also includes the moral implications which necessarily result from genuine faith in the truth: “For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:10).

The Scriptures Convict by Exposing Incorrect Belief

Paul’s unique choice of words (*elegmón*) which occurs only here in the NT has the sense of “rebuke” (2 Tim. 3:16b). In other words, a correct apprehension of Scripture refutes

That the Scriptures Are the Final Authority for Belief and Behavior

error. Paul expresses the identical concept in 2 Timothy 4:2: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

In light of the increasing biblical illiteracy in our culture and churches, the responsibility to include sound biblical content, interpretation, and application in preaching is greater now than it was in a more biblically literate culture. Yet the trend is toward skits and rock music in lieu of preaching and teaching. To the extent that people rely upon the presentation, whatever form it may take, it will be the functional authority. Eventually, dilution of belief in the authority of the Bible is inevitable.

Pragmatism also tends to redefine the message of Scripture. “What works,” the most vital concern to modern pragmatists, becomes the ultimate rubric in ministry. Pragmatists, consequently, nullify the authority of Scripture through “Jesuit casuistry”—the end justifies the means. While the Bible lays out a basic methodology in ministry of assembly, prayer, worship, preaching, teaching, witnessing, and serving, it also specifies significant principles governing how these activities are to be done. In the current church-growth movement and mission techniques, scriptural methods and principles are being displaced by pragmatic considerations. Rather than going to the Bible, many “ministries” draw primarily on the behavioral sciences.²

This increasing pragmatism in both Evangelical and Fundamental churches can be seen in the current hymnody emerging out of the cacophony of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), resulting in the diminishment of biblical truth. The New Testament local church must teach and admonish with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as a result of being richly indwelt with the Word of God (Eph. 5:18–20; Col. 3:16). After all, when people leave the church service, they are humming the songs, not the sermon. Believers are indoctrinated through the hymnal as well as the pulpit. Unfortunately, many Christian songs are chosen on the basis of how they make one feel as opposed to what they teach. Pay careful attention to the doctrinal affirmations and omissions of what Christians sing today, and one will ascertain not only what people currently believe, but more importantly what they *will* believe.

The modern pop music of the CCM movement, with its trickledown effect into the Fundamentalist environment, often preaches a *moral immanence*³ between the creature and the Creator. Ultimately, one sees a “detheologized” view of the Lord Jesus Christ, an overemphasis on His humanity, and a de-emphasis of His deity and authority. As long as He is the friend and helper who fills human

needs, Christians will worship the Son of God with a “Jesus is my boyfriend” demeanor and lyric. One can only hope that this continuous detheologizing of the Christian salvation experience will soon reveal its shallowness for what it is. Only then will a renewed emphasis upon doctrinal preaching and biblical evangelism which calls sinners to a true conversion motivate believers to reverentially express their faith with songs delineating the full spectrum of biblical truth.

The Scriptures Correct by Exposing Aberrant Behavior

“Correction” (*epanórhōsin*, 2 Tim. 3:16c) is used in the sense of “setting something right,” most likely with reference to conduct as it was sometimes used in extrabiblical literature.⁴ God’s Word has the authority to regulate personal and public conduct.

Attitudes and behavior among “Christian” young people toward things once considered wrong and sinful are gradually changing. There has been a noticeable shift in attitudes toward smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, objectionable movies, questionable entertainment, rock music, modern sensual dancing, gambling, physical involvement outside of marriage, androgyny, and public immodesty. Richard Quebedeaux, a self-professed New Evangelical, admits in *The Worldly Evangelicals*, “Evangelicals are making more and more compromises with the larger culture.” He adds that “Evangelicals have become harder and harder to distinguish from other people,” pointing out that Christian “business people, professionals, and celebrities have found it necessary (and pleasant) to travel the cocktail-party circuit in Beverly Hills.” Finally, he mentions with approval, “Evangelicals have often discovered the pleasure of alcohol and tobacco while studying and traveling in Europe.”⁵

What has contributed to this decline? I suggest that a lack of commitment to the ethical message in the Scriptures carries much of the responsibility. The absence of doctrinal, authoritative preaching on sin and the complete depravity of fallen humanity has hastened the moral decline in both Western culture and individual Christians. A “dysfunctional” view of sin has revamped preaching and evangelistic strategy. Words such as “sin,” “guilt,” and “wickedness” are being replaced with euphemisms such as “mistake,” “estrangement,” “maladjustment,” “indiscretion,” or “imprudence.” “Sin,” in today’s religious world, is no longer against God but against oneself. Selfishness, rather than being the essence of all sin, has become the goal of redemption. Ministers appeal to man’s selfishness in their preaching because they know that self is what really moti-

vates people. Human need now beckons the unfulfilled to receive “wholeness” at the foot of the cross. How, one may ask, can anyone actually repent in such an environment? The regression is from the biblical position which says, “I’m not OK, you’re not OK,” to the popular notion of the seventies, “I’m OK, you’re OK,” culminating in the current self-esteem craze: “I’m OK, I’m OK.” Consequently, sin has not been a popular subject for Christian authors or pastors. A virtual paucity on the subject exists today.

The Scriptures Counsel by Establishing Correct Behavior

Finally, God’s Word “trains” or “disciplines in righteousness” (*pròs paideían tèn en dikaiosýnēi*, 2 Tim. 3:16d). The training is designed to produce conduct whereby “righteousness” (*dikaiosýnēi*) becomes a reality in the life of the believer. Holiness literally means, “to cut,” “to separate,” or to be “set apart.”⁶ Theologically it refers to the majestic transcendence of God by emphasizing the distinction between the Creator and the creature. Second, holiness means that God is separate in His being from all that is evil, impure, and defiled.

Righteousness relates to God’s holiness in that it corresponds to God’s purity. Righteousness entails moral integrity of action and disposition according to God’s perfect standard. The term is used here in the simple sense of “right conduct” (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; Rom. 6:13; 9:20a). Such training or discipline is designed to bring one’s behavior into conformity to God’s holiness.

Generally, God’s love is emphasized today in Evangelical circles much more than are His holiness and righteousness. God is love (1 John 4:7–16). Nevertheless, God’s love is governed by His holiness; otherwise, His love would be reduced to capricious sentimentality. God’s holiness necessitates His judicial wrath against that which is opposed to His character and commands. Psalm 97:10 says, “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil.” God hates “every false way” (Ps. 119:104). God “[hates] all workers of iniquity” (Ps. 5:5). Conformity to Christ can be summarized in Romans 12:9, “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good”; “Hate the evil, and love the good” (Amos 5:15); “And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts . . . for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD” (Zech. 8:17).

Likewise, James declares that “friendship” with the world is the height of infidelity with God (James 4:4). God tells His people plainly, “Love not the world” (1 John 2:15), “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11), and “be not conformed to this world”

(Rom. 12:2). The world is at total cross-purposes with God because it is “not of the Father.”

As my systematic theology professor, Dr. Rolland McCune, explained, the term *kosmos* (world) emphasizes the *present*, meaning the present arrangement of things. The world is the current, secular mindset with its ever-changing values, symbols, goals, and priorities. It always emphasizes the “now.” Thus, the world is transient, always on the move, and “passing away.” It believes in “change” for its own sake. As such, the world is humanistic, being structured by autonomous man and his “I’m worth it” philosophy. It consists of the desires of modern man’s sinful, fleshly, and prideful nature, his self-esteem and self-fulfillment syndrome. Worldliness includes both those outward activities and inward affections for and attachment to some aspect of the present arrangement of things. This includes the world’s thought patterns, amusements, fads, habits, philosophies, goals, friendships, practices, and lifestyles.

Generally speaking, people today are not impressed with Christianity, primarily because they are not impressed with Christians. If, on the one hand, we are not self-righteous snobs smothered in hypocrisy, then on the other hand we are meaningless religionists blending in with society. In each scenario modern Christians are an offense or a disappointment. In contrast to the above, how does the believer combat worldliness and train himself for righteousness? First, Paul says, “make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14). The word “provision” (*prónoian*) carries the idea of “forethought” which literally means “to have a mind before.” The apostle commands believers not to use their intellect sinfully in order to discover various ways to fulfill the desires of the fleshly nature. A man must yield to the Spirit of God and refuse to exercise a fleshly intellect by making

forethought to sin.

In addition, believers are admonished to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). Contextually, Paul is concerned with the influence of other people who are succumbing to fleshly activity (2 Cor. 6:14–7:2). In this case, believers are not to enter into a spiritual yoke or union with those whose lives are characterized by the fleshly nature. Believers are not to disassociate themselves altogether from sinners in this world. The goal of relationships with the unregenerate is the salvation of the lost, “pulling” them as branches from the fire, “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 1:23). Yet one must not enter into a yoke where it would be impossible to avoid being negatively influenced and having one’s “temple” defiled.

Righteousness relates to God’s holiness in that it corresponds to God’s purity. Righteousness entails moral integrity of action and disposition according to God’s perfect standard. . . . Such training or discipline is designed to bring one’s behavior into conformity to God’s holiness.

Finally, the people of God are not to abuse or misuse their liberty in Christ as an occasion to fulfill the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:13). In this present age believers are not under the Mosaic Law as a governing constitution for the New Testament local church. However, every command and principle in the OT that is rooted in the unchanging character of God, the created order, and is repeated or adjusted in the NT carries over into each new, succeeding dispensation. In this sense, the Law of Moses remains a *corroborative witness* to the will of God for believers in the NT church age. Paul's concern here is that believers not abuse their new standing in Christ by using the grace of God as a cloak for sinful, fleshly behavior. Paul revolted against such perverted thinking. Freedom from the Mosaic Law does not imply freedom from commands, principles, precepts, directives, prohibitions, or biblical standards and applications.

How are we trained in righteousness? We are trained by "renewing the mind" in the Word of God. By faith believers seek God's will through the Word of God in every decision (James 4:15). By faith believers reject worldly wisdom (1 Cor. 3:18). Specific directives regarding our attitudes and actions include the moral commands and precepts of God's Word (Exod. 20:1-17; 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 6:9-10; Gal. 5:16-21; Eph. 5:1-7; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). In addition, God lays down numerous principles by which believers are to make wise decisions regarding our behavior in the world:

1. The principle of enslavement (self-control)

(1 Cor. 6:12) "**All things are lawful unto me** [Corinthian slogan of antinomianism⁷], but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, **but I will not be brought under the power of any.**"

(1 Cor. 9:27) "**But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.**"

2. The principle of offense

(Rom. 14:13-16) "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. . . . Let not then your good be evil spoken of."

(1 Cor. 10:32) "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God."

3. The principle of God's glory

(1 Cor. 6:20) "For ye are bought with a price: therefore **glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.**"

4. The principle of a biblically educated conscience

(Rom. 14:23) "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: **for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.**"

5. The principle of Christ's name (authority)

(Col. 3:17) "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

6. The principle of corruption by association

(1 Cor. 15:33) "**Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.**"

7. The principle of peace in the Body of Christ

(Col. 3:15) "**And let the peace of God rule in your hearts**, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."

8. The principle of edification

(Rom. 15:1-2) "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. **Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.**"

Conclusion

The Bible is fully sufficient for the salvation of man and the development of the believer into full maturity (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Through the assimilated Word of God, each person who belongs to God is to be "fully equipped" by the Holy Spirit so that they may know either in precept or in principle what God expects them to believe and how God expects them to behave.

Many churches are in poor health because they feed on junk food, artificial preservatives, and unnatural substitutes, instead of the milk and meat of the Word. Consequently, a worldwide spiritual famine has resulted from the absence of any genuine proclamation of the Word of God (Amos 8:11)—an absence that continues to run wild and unabated. Unless there is a serious correction, the NT Church of the Lord Jesus Christ will suffer increasingly from hazy preaching, muddled heads, fretful hearts, and paralyzing uncertainty. As my systematic theology professor often said, "A mist in the pulpit usually results with a fog in the pew."

Dr. Mike Harding has pastored First Baptist Church of Troy, Michigan, since 1985. He and his wife, Jennifer, have four adult children.



¹ George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 449.

² David J. Hesselgrave, *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission: An Evangelical Perspective on Trends and Issues in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 138-43.

³ "Moral immanence" is a view that places man and God in an immediate relationship, ignoring the infinite gap between God and man and the separation created by sin.

⁴ "Epanórhōsin is used only once in the NT (BAGD, 282).

⁵ Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 12, 14, 118.

⁶ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, reprint ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 871.

⁷ Antinomianism (literally "against law") is the title given to the view which espouses that because believers are under grace they are not bound by the moral principles and commands of God's Word; therefore, they may sin with impunity because God's grace abounds. This view is refuted in Romans 6:1-2.

“

An Interview with Dr. Vaughn on Current Trends in Fundamentalism

”

The reason we have produced this issue of *FrontLine* is because the subject of Convergence has become front and center in so many of our discussions, and we have been asked repeatedly to put something in print about it. In some form or another, the following question comes up regularly and with urgency: “What is happening to our churches, our schools—to Fundamentalism? It has to be something beyond a departure from FBFI; it seems like a departure from Fundamentalism altogether.”

The responses given in this interview are mine. Like all authors who write for *FrontLine*, I am responsible for them. In my role as President of FBFI and Editor of *FrontLine*, I speak for the Fellowship, but to the degree that any member of FBFI disagrees with me, I take full responsibility for my words and pray that no one will think that I have usurped my position to speak unfairly for them.

Q

How would you define Historic Fundamentalism?

That would depend on how you are using the term. If by “historic” you mean the Fundamentalism that declared itself in 1920, I think there would be general clarity and agreement that it refers to the stand for the fundamentals of the faith against liberalism. However, in my personal experience, I began to hear the term around ten to fifteen years ago as a way of differing pre-1948 Fundamentalism (essentially pre-separation Fundamentalism) from what some perceived to be the excesses of separatism. Certainly, within the last decade there has been a tendency to equate separatist Fundamentalism with the moral failures and dictatorial ecclesiology of the unbiblical Hyles movement. I believe that the term “Historic Fundamentalism” was a practical term some used to distance themselves from that error.

I am not as conversant with other possible ways of understanding the term as I am of this use, but it seemed to me to be a term preferred by people who had grown up in Fundamental churches and schools who were seeking to distance themselves from what many of them called “Movement Fundamentalism.” I too heard the term “our movement” very much over the years and well recall the discomfort I felt when being rebuffed for asking legitimate questions about it. I can certainly understand the

frustration of having simple inquiries treated like overt challenges. I wonder if young men today understand that those of us in our sixties and seventies felt the same way as a number of them do, for the same reasons, when we were trying to figure these things out when we were young.

Nevertheless, those who were using the term in this recent period—the last ten to fifteen years—seemed willing to defend the doctrinal position of the original Fundamentalists from 1920 to 1948 but were distancing themselves not only from the excesses but from the logical and proper consequence of that position—separation. Their arguments seemed at that time to be very similar to those of the “Neo-Evangelicals” from Harold Ockenga through the active Billy Graham years, but these more recent men who had been known as separatist Fundamentalists were giving in to “Conservative Evangelical” appeals and arguing that separatists are “legalists,” so some chose to call themselves “Historic Fundamentalists.” There followed a brief period when some of them actually identified themselves as “Conservative Evangelicals,” and some of them have proved to be, in fact, *new* Neo-Evangelicals. Thus, in its reaction to separatist Fundamentalism as a “movement,” what was known ten years ago as “Historic Fundamentalism” seems to have become the seedbed of an “anti-Fundamentalist movement.”

In 2010 an intriguing article by Ben Wright appeared on the 9Marks website; it was titled “An Evangelical-Fundamentalist Convergence.” Interestingly, within FBFI, some of us had begun to use the term “convergence” because we found it in the Webster’s *Thesaurus* as an antonym to “separation.” Unaware of Wright’s article at the time, we now find his insights prescient. The tone of the article indicates that Wright thought such a convergence was promising, as did some within FBFI. Six years after Wright spoke of an Evangelical-Fundamentalist Convergence, there has emerged an element of eager “Convergents” who are violating the pastoral theology and ethics they claim are better expressed by those from the New Evangelical heritage. Defining Fundamentalism by the most outrageous examples of men who have claimed the term, these Convergents are not achieving an Evangelical-Fundamentalist Convergence but a “Fundamentalist Defection into a new New-Evangelicalism.” Embarrassment about one’s Fundamentalist heritage would hardly legitimize an unethical departure from it.

I believe it is unhelpful to see Fundamentalism as a “movement,” although most of us have referred to it in that way. When we do, we are not referring to the externals or “rules,” as is often the claim. In truth, Fundamentalism is not just a doctrinal position. Fundamentalism is the doctrinal position, plus the way in which that doctrinal position is held, proclaimed, and defended. I believe Dr. Bob Jones Jr. was correct in saying that a biblical Fundamentalist is “one who believes the Bible, obeys the Bible, proclaims the Bible, and defends the Bible.” Thus, Fundamentalism is an attitude about the Bible that results in that belief, obedience, proclamation, and defense. Like the original Neo-Evangelicals, who separated from separatist Fundamentalism, there is a new wave of separation from what is incorrectly perceived to be FBFI-style Fundamentalism over many in the current generation’s discomfort with separation. I do not believe that is historic Fundamentalism; it is historic New Evangelicalism.

Q What do you perceive are the greatest strengths and weaknesses of FBFI?

The greatest strength of FBFI is the consistency of its doctrinal position and its practical application of that position in life and ministry. Consistent logic and obedience lead to biblical Fundamentalism, not to what some have chosen to call “cultural Fundamentalism.” Although some question our claim to a heritage clearly traceable to 1920, we share the original “Fundamentalist Fellowship” nomenclature and the strength our forerunners demonstrated. Thus, in addition to the logic of our position and our efforts to be obedient, we have a near century-long heritage as Fundamental Baptists—as do some others, of course. Our weakness is our humanness, to be sure, but also our numerical smallness, which limits our resources and therefore our opportunities to proclaim and defend the fundamentals and their implications. I do not see the departure of some of our friends in recent years (even to follow methods and men who are the New Evangelicals of today, whatever we are to call them) as our weakness, but rather as the proper and necessary purging of those who claimed to be Fundamentalists who, today, are not. Our smallness is unfortunate but not to be regretted if it is the result of obedience. The strength of any group lies largely in the strength of those who are coming into it. Of course, we must seek to mentor our younger brethren and should celebrate success in that effort when it comes, but I think the larger number of new Fundamentalists develops as young men take their own stand against the excesses of their peers. Thankfully, there is encouraging evidence of that happening today.

Q What are you trying to accomplish by using the term “Convergence” and referring to some as “Convergents”? Do we really need any more negative names for others?

We are seeking clarity as we talk about a very real problem and a real, identifiable movement. Conversations tend to devolve into frustration when inaccurate terms

are used. For example, many refer to Convergents as “New Calvinists.” The appellation “New Calvinist” is not helpful because Calvinism, *per se*, has always been a legitimate doctrinal position within Fundamentalism. But neither were the other terms men were reaching for when trying to have necessary discussions about this third stream helpful; “these young guys” is probably the worst.


Calvinism may have gained traction as an identifier because it seems to be a common denominator among Convergents who, until recently, were not as committed to that position as they now seem to be. Reformed thinking is only one of a cluster of identifiers and often occurs within premature applications of pastoral theology, such as urgent restatements of organizational documents to clarify this new light on Calvinist doctrine. There is also present a new emphasis on “liberty,” which soon leads to a diminishing of standards and applications regarding what would have been considered worldliness until recently—for example, the liberty to consume beverage alcohol. In addition, CCM has recently found its way into the worship services of Convergent churches. We have no desire to brand as “Convergent” any church that seeks to update and clarify its practice in legitimate ways, but an accurate, appropriate term is needed to avoid the current confusion and level of frustration that exists because good words are being used with negative connotations and inaccurate terms are being used in a sincere effort to identify the problem. Convergent is not a “negative name” any more than Separatist is a negative name in this context. These terms refer to opposite relationships to worldliness.

Two final observations on this phenomenon may be helpful. First, when discussing it with those who are concerned about it, this cluster of identifiers is almost immediately recognized as obvious and widespread. Second, when the phenomenon is discussed with one of its proponents, the defender will insist that all of these new positions and practices came solely through personal, private, prayerful study of the Bible and not through the influence of popular Conservative Evangelicals, peer pressure, blog participation, or pressure from doctrinally deficient businessmen who bring the corporate model of administration with them into church. This defensive argument could, in fact, be added as one of the elements of the cluster. Perhaps pastors, churches, and schools moving in this direction are not taking cues from each other, but neither do they seem to be taking instruction from the destructive consequences of this direction in other ministries. So far, we know of no instance of a Convergent recovering himself or his ministry from this movement.

Q What is your vision for FBFI, and where do you see FBFI in ten years?

The Vision Statement of the FBFI is my vision as well: *The FBFI Vision is to perpetuate the heritage of Baptist Fundamentalism complete, intact, pure, and undiluted to succeeding generations of Fundamentalists.* I think it

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“Why I Left My Fundamental Baptist Church”

“Why I Left My Fundamental Baptist Church” may sound like the title of an article written by a Convergent believer or as a heading over the testimony of someone claiming to have been abused by a Fundamental church or ministry. On the contrary, it is used here in a very different way. In fact, the title of this article might more accurately have been, “Why I Left My *Formerly* Fundamental Baptist Church.” We are hearing these words more and more from many who are sorrowfully making the difficult decision to leave a church that was established as Fundamental but has been converging with the philosophy and methods of the New Evangelicalism. We are not describing a new church plant that is being established on “relaxed” practices on which the church planter and those that attend fully agree, but long-established churches that are being changed through the hidden agenda of Convergent leadership.

How is it possible for a church to get to the place that it is being controlled by those who seem to have little appreciation, and in some cases even disdain, for the strong separatist Fundamental position upon which it was founded? Some of the answers may be found by comparing those doing the “controlling” with the Old Testament character of Absalom. His father, David, after many years of great trials, hard work, numerous battles, and miraculous victories, was used of God to unite and establish the great nation of Israel. And yet that which took him years of blood, sweat, and tears to establish was taken away from him by someone very close to him who, “stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (2 Sam. 15:6b). To this day when Bible students hear the name “Absalom,” they associate it with a heart-stealer.

The purpose of this article is not to warn the heart-stealer but rather to warn those who are susceptible to having their hearts stolen—a warning that must oft be repeated even as the apostle Paul “ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31) about those of their own assembly who would arise to attract disciples to come behind them. If there were heart-stealers in David’s day and in Paul’s day, it is certain they exist today. And if someone is good at stealing hearts, the vigilant believer must learn how to identify him. A fitting lesson is provided in the story of Absalom, a man whose methods seemed to be virtues but were actually vices. Absalom employed at least four vices that had the face of virtues.

The Vice of Laziness as the Virtue of Integrity and Privilege

We first learn of Absalom in 2 Samuel 3:3 where we are told that he was the third son of David and that his mother was Maacah, daughter of Talmai the king of Geshur. So Absalom’s father was a king as was his maternal grandfather. Absalom therefore had the *privilege* of growing up with perceived integrity and surrounded by royalty, facts that he effectively used as a

means to avoid *having to face difficulty*. For example, when he fled from his father King David after having murdered his half-brother Amnon, all he had to do was run to his grandpa King Talmi (2 Sam. 13:37) who aided and abetted him in his self-made difficulty by providing him refuge without rebuke or censure.

It is often observed that one who has a life of privilege strives to avoid work, struggle, and difficulty. One of the self-admitted characteristics of some of the misnamed “young fundamentalists”¹ is that they “are products of Christian schools”² and, as used in an illustrated case, “have no idea how to relate to lost people.”³ Sadly, the spirituality they were perceived to have possessed from the privilege of having a lifetime of Christian education was also the cause of many of them being isolated from the difficulty of head-on confrontation with sin and brazen sinners, an adversity that previous generations of Fundamentalists met, with the welcomed reinforcement of their Fundamental churches, by having to take a noticeable stand in secular schools. The fact that a lot of these privileged individuals did not have to challenge worldliness during their growing-up years may explain why today, as adults, they are so eager to experiment with and sometimes defend the beverage use of alcohol, accept any style of music in home and even in worship, join hands with rebels in so-called “social justice” causes, consider the battles against sexual perversions as “lost,” and generally poke fun at the practice of biblical separation that was so clear-cut to their predecessors.

The Vice of Hypocrisy as the Virtue of Transparency

Absalom’s second vice was *hypocrisy*, a hypocrisy he concealed behind efforts to give the impression that he was *transparent*. Absalom did not state his intentions up front. He had a hidden agenda behind what Keil and Delitzsch label as a “pretended vow.”⁴ The Greek word for “hypocrite” includes the sense of play-actor.⁵ So with one face “on-stage,” Absalom piously came across to David as transparent: “I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD” (2 Sam. 15:7b–8). With his other face “off-stage,” Absalom exploited David’s permission as his opportunity to get out of Jerusalem under the watchful eye of his father and go to Hebron where his father had established his kingship (2 Sam. 5:1). From this strategic location Absalom was able to send his spies throughout his father’s kingdom to incite a successful rebellion.

There has been a lot of talk about transparency lately, and the more one talks about “being transparent,” especially in a self-deprecating way, the more it makes him appear to be virtuous. The unethical man, however, is able to use it as a pretense when he speaks much of it on-stage in order to distract attention from his counteractions off-stage. Instead of truly being transparent up front by honestly informing a church or institution about his philosophy of ministry and the changes he would make, a candidate for a leading

position can couch his hidden agenda with boisterous talk of “transparency.”

This is well illustrated by the way President Obama used transparency as a ruse to cram through his subversive health care agenda. Jonathan Gruber, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology economics professor who was one of the architects of Obamacare, afterward spilled the beans on how the whole scheme of this debacle was successfully passed: “He said that while the administration promised transparency, lack of transparency was the key to getting the legislation through.”⁶

The Vice of Conspiracy as the Virtue of Concern

The fact that a heart-stealer cannot accomplish his work alone brings us to Absalom’s third vice: *conspiracy* with the virtuous face of *concern*. Absalom’s concern for his father’s subjects was a camouflage for the formation of a conspiracy. He took advantage of those who were easily flattered by expressions of sincerity (2 Sam. 15:5). He called upon others, who knew nothing of his designs, to follow him in their simplicity (2 Sam. 15:11). And he somehow recruited Ahithophel, who had served close to his father but was willing to come to his own side and make the conspiracy strong (2 Sam. 15:12).

There are those within churches and institutions who are easily flattered into facilitating the installation of a heart-stealer. And in some cases they are even knowingly complicit in advancing the agenda of the heart-stealer with the innocent! These may be those pulpit committee members who, given the responsibility of seeking a new pastor, sense the opportunity for transformation they have long desired. Or the deacon whose personal agenda may have been thwarted by the strong leadership qualities of the pastor. Or perhaps it is the dismissed assistant or youth pastor whose laziness would not be tolerated by a disappointed pastor. Or it may be board members or administrators of an institution who are desperately “concerned” about the impact student recruitment and retention will have upon the financial bottom line. Any of these types of people are ripe fruit for the picking by the heart-stealer.

The Vice of Craftiness as the Virtue of Patience

Lastly, Absalom was a man of *patience*, a virtue that allowed him to *craftily scheme* for two years until he found opportunity to murder his half-brother Amnon. Patience was also the face he subsequently wore to give time for things to “cool off” before informing his father of the vow he needed to pay in Hebron as a front to usurping his throne. He patiently, or craftily, waited four long years⁷ before requesting his father’s permission to leave town. While Absalom waited he was able to superficially adapt, even conveying the impression that he was helping to reduce his father’s workload (2 Sam. 15:2–6a). Meanwhile, he was making incremental advances into the hearts of David’s subjects (2 Sam. 15:6b). A heart-stealer never comes at his victim displaying who he really is. He will wear the

garment of patience to make others think he has intentions of peace. And then once he is in power his patience morphs into impatience with those who are obstacles to his agenda.

The same thing has been transpiring among Fundamental works for the last decade or so. For example, almost fifteen years ago this writer was given an undated article entitled "The Future Fundamentalists: Where Are the Young Guys Headed?" The author of this six-and-a-half-page article concluded with this advice to his fellow "young fundamentalists" regarding their response to the Fundamentalism so many of them had come to despise:

You have three choices: depart, splinter, or adapt. . . . If you splinter and desire to create a "new fundamentalism," ask yourself some serious questions. . . . **Do you want to start all new** colleges, camps, seminaries, and fellowships? . . . I would like to encourage you to **adapt and wait**. Over the process of time, we will grow and learn from both sides. Remember, **we will have our moment** in the sun. We will become leaders within fundamentalism **when it is our time**. And, if you still have the same feelings, **use that influence to effect positive change**. . . . We have something to offer and we will affect fundamentalism for the better. **Let's just wait our turn**⁸ [emphases mine].

Notice the encouragement to "adapt." That allows the Convergent to "patiently" go along with the flow, act like a Fundamentalist, and talk the talk until the opportunity arises to effect the change desired from the outset. Then he becomes impatient to make the changes quickly. By not stating his intentions up front he can take the time to steal the hearts of as many people as possible, and when it is his time, his "moment in the sun," he can begin to institute his fundamental transformation. Those who established the work who are "stuck in the past" and resistant to change will soon be in the minority and will have to go elsewhere. The Convergent can pretend he is sorry to see them go because he will by then have confederates like Shimei who will on their own shame the "old-time religion" adherents for being hateful, intolerant, and men "of Belial" (2 Sam. 16:7). "Belial" is a relevant term for them to use since it communicates "worthlessness." It comes from the root word that means "old, worn out."⁹ In essence they are saying, "You, your viewpoints, and your ways are old and worn out."

For years many Fundamentalists have been befuddled by the self-induced heartburn some Fundamentalist leaders have suffered in trying to retain those who others saw as exhibiting the "adapt and wait" mentality. Conferences and fellowships, rather than being a time of encouragement and blessing to ministry leaders who were trying to take an uncompromising stand, instead became self-flagellation sessions and hand-wringing discussions about how to hold onto "the young guys." Rather than letting them leave to endure on their own the hard work of founding their own ministries, there has instead been an ongoing, never-before-seen pandering that has resulted in their eventual installation in and transformation of Fundamental ministries.

Why are heartbroken Fundamental Baptists having to leave their formerly Fundamental Baptist churches and ministries? Because men with the spirit of Absalom have arisen from within to steal hearts. There are at least four characteristics of that spirit of which to beware. Watch for those who consider themselves privileged and exempt from the difficulties of separation. Be on guard for those who, for pretense, invest much in advertising their supposed transparency. Be cautious about the one who wears the face of concern to conceal the vice of conspiring, gravitating to "yes-men" while ignoring or avoiding those who disagree with him. And be aware of the man who seems to "talk the talk" but not "walk the walk," covering his craftiness with what appears to be patience.

On the campaign trail in June of 2008 Barack Hussein Obama declared, "This is our moment. This is our time, our time to turn the page on the policies of the past . . . to offer a new direction for this country."¹⁰ Then five days before the election he spoke, not of restoring America, but of "fundamentally transforming the United States of America."¹¹

How sad that Convergents have become to Fundamental churches and institutions what Barack Obama has become to the United States of America.

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¹ Misnamed because the term has more to do with a mentality than an age group.

² Jason Janz, "The Future Fundamentalists: Where Are the Young Guys Headed?", n.d., 5.

³ Ibid.

⁴ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Books of Samuel*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), 2:416.

⁵ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *upokriths, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 845.

⁶ Dinesh D'Souza, *Stealing America: What My Experience with Criminal Gangs Taught Me about Obama, Hillary, and the Democratic Party* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 271.

⁷ Keil and Delitzsch, 415-16: "The number forty is altogether unsuitable, as it cannot possibly be understood either as relating to the age of Absalom or to the year of David's reign, and David only reigned forty years and a half in all, and Absalom's rebellion certainly did not take place in the last few weeks of his reign. . . . 'Four years' must certainly be the correct [reading]."

⁸ Janz, 6-7.

⁹ Walter C. Kaiser, *bala, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:110.

¹⁰ http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/03/us/politics/03text-obama.html?_r=0, accessed July 13, 2016

¹¹ http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/10/obama_rallies_columbia_missour.html, accessed July 13, 2016

Approving Things That Are Excellent: Discernment in Music

This article and appeal are rooted in Paul's heartfelt prayer in Philippians 1:9–10: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."

In Paul's prayer the word "judgment" means "discernment" and is so rendered in many good translations. Note that Paul differentiates "discernment" (the application of truth) from "knowledge" (the presentation of truth), a distinction frequently found in Scripture. Accordingly, Paul explains that this knowledge and discernment would enable believers to "approve things that are excellent," a phrase that literally means "to the end that ye may put to proof the things that differ, or the things that are more profitable" (Adam Clarke, *Commentary*, 1832). By the pure and abundant love which they received from God, they would be able to try whatever differed from the teaching they had received and from the experience they had in spiritual things. Further, Paul desired that the Philippians

would be without offense: "Neither offending God nor your neighbor; neither being stumbled yourselves, nor the cause of stumbling to others" (Clarke). The great need is for abounding love that approves things that are excellent. Discernment is, indeed, the missing gift.

Some within Fundamentalism, sadly, are questioning or even rejecting this ideal for discipleship. While there seems to be in some a genuine thirst for knowledge of the Word, it is increasingly accompanied by a rejection of discerning *applications* of Scripture. Fundamental churches are finding themselves at a crossroads. In fact, all too frequently, the very mention of "discernment" or "application" is met with the charge of "legalism." After more than a decade of intense discussion, the subject of applications seems almost to have been silenced. Although this issue of *FrontLine* attempts to offer some explanation for this phenomenon, this article is essentially an appeal for a biblical model for discipleship, a model based not just on the *teaching* of knowledge so much as on the careful and discerning *application* of that knowledge—discernment—particularly in music.

We know that all Scripture is profitable for all believers (2 Tim. 3:16), that the Bible contains all things that pertain to our salvation and spiritual walk in Christ (2 Pet. 1:3), and that we can be confident that biblical principles will guide all cultures in every generation. Furthermore, while

we may not totally agree on exactly which principles are best applied in every situation, surely we understand that Scripture provides what we need if we strive to understand it and apply it as best we can in our lives. Of course, there is room for differences among discerning people who arrive at different applications of clear biblical principles. Nevertheless, one of the greatest sources of tension among believers for a generation has been, of course, music.

A History of Concerns

Though worldly, sensual music has always existed in every culture throughout human history, nonetheless, a recent worldliness has appeared with an intensity not been seen before. The church has opened its arms to embrace the popular sounds of the culture around it, making use of pop styles for Christian worship music and private devotional life. This phenomenon did not occur without dissent. First, within the major denominations, voices of concern were raised, primarily because they were the first to feel the waves of the culture splashing into their churches. Books were written by Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Southern Baptists warning of the advance of popular culture into the church. Even the Seventh-Day Adventists, Brethren congregations, and Roman Catholics were addressing the issue. By the mid-1980s, the independent Fundamental Baptist movement began to experience the same onslaught of popular culture. Men such as Frank Garlock and Danny Sweatt devoted much time and many resources to speak out about this danger. Others added our voices to the discussion. Books were written and seminars were held, and, no doubt, in our zeal we made mistakes. But the danger was real, and it is worse today. We cannot back down from stressing the urgent need to warn believers of this danger.

Not to rehash a subject some would consider to be outdated and irrelevant, but to illustrate how consistent are the arguments against warnings regarding music, consider the personality of Steve Green. I (Fisher) say “personality” because of the way the teenagers of that era framed their questions and arguments. Anyone old enough can remember the “Big Three” of CCM in the early years: Steve Green, Amy Grant, and Sandi Patty. While many teenagers (and even adults) are still convinced that *we* started the fight and targeted these individuals, quite the opposite is true. The need for warnings was not imagined by us; it was evident in the arguments of the teens. In fact, throughout more than twenty-five years of preaching on music I never initiated a public discussion about Steve Green. But upon hearing the preaching of scriptural principles about music or worship, the audience would invariably bring him up.

When I questioned individuals as to why his name was always mentioned first, the answers were both consistent and revealing. Whether in churches, Christian high schools, or Christian colleges, the comment was always the same: “We bring up Steve Green because we know

The popularity of SG music . . . has increased dramatically in recent years, in large part because of the promotion it has received from Fundamental Christian colleges and evangelists.

that if you say he is OK, then we can listen to whatever we want.” In the early 1990s I wrote an article entitled “Why I Cannot Support Steve Green,” an article which, until recently, was the most-requested item from those who have contacted me. That article was a way of putting into writing my thoughts on the ecumenical nature of Steve Green’s concert sponsorship as well as the blatant use of the rock idiom in his music. The problem has

never been with the individual, Steve Green, but rather with the personality and what his identity represented—the danger of where his music and philosophy of ministry would eventually take young, immature Christians. Now, my participation in this article is a way of putting into writing my thoughts on a newer, similar movement and personality.

As it unfolded, the CCM/Steve Green controversy raised questions that are still asked today. For example, “Can we clean up any of his songs and use them in our conservative churches?” “Can we listen to recordings of his ‘good’ songs?” “Should we ever go to one of his concerts?” “Do we have the right to criticize a Christian brother just because we don’t agree with his music?” Clearly, these questions dealt with the broader principle of *associations and offense*, a discussion that is dismissed before it begins by a generation being taught that it smacks of legalism. As one person remarked to me, “We don’t go there anymore.” It is as if Romans 14 has become irrelevant unless you find yourself offered literal meat that has been offered to literal idols! The same is true of unwelcome discussions of what the Bible actually says about *liberty*. How far we have come from understanding that liberty refers to *what you are free to give up for the cause of Christ* to arrive at the present insistence that it refers to what you are free to indulge in unless it is specifically prohibited in a clear statement of Scripture. It is almost as if Bible principles cannot exist apart from specific Bible prohibitions. The new rule is “no rules.”

The Current Controversy

Currently, the same discussions are taking place over another personality and the movement it has spawned—Sovereign Grace (SG). SG is led by C. J. Mahaney and based in Gaithersburg, Maryland. It is rooted in both Reformed Theology and Charismatic/Pentecostal experience. If you doubt this, please visit the SG website and read the doctrinal statement. SG is clearly ecumenical in its roots, and it embraces pop music styles in its worship. The main musical figures promoted by or associated with the Sovereign Grace movement are Bob Kauflin and Steve and Vikki Cook. But also included in this discussion are musicians who, although not specifically associated with SG, are nonetheless closely identified with the movement because of their presence on SG recordings: Stuart Townend and Keith and Kristyn Getty, who are becoming favorites of some independent Fundamental Baptists. Including the


names Townend and Getty in this discussion does not imply that they are in complete theological agreement with SG, but the similarity of their musical style as well as their collaborative efforts over the years with SG are reasons for concern. The history of the development of Sovereign Grace Ministries is a subject worthy of a separate article. However, it is probable that most pastors and churches that have embraced SG music are unaware of or unconcerned with its roots. A brief summary is in order, and it necessarily raises the much-despised argument of associations, but it is important to review.

Sovereign Grace Ministries grew out of the Charismatic renewal of the 1970s under the leadership of Catholic Charismatic Larry Tomczak and has its roots in the Gathering of Believers (now Covenant Life Church) in Maryland (Tomczak, *Clap Your Hands*, Word Publishing, 1989, pp. 179–96.) It was formally established in 1982. C. J. Mahaney, whom Larry Tomczak had been asked to “take under [his] wing and help . . . grow in the faith” in 1972, was the co-founder of both Covenant Life and People of Destiny (Tomczak, p. 164). Both Mahaney and Tomczak withdrew from the Charismatic Catholic scene shortly before the creation of Covenant Life Church. Sovereign Grace Ministries was known as “People of Destiny International” (PDI) until 1998 (*Christianity Today*, News Briefs, April 27, 1998). British New Church leader Terry Virgo in *No Well-Worn Paths*, p. 145, states that Larry Tomczak and Mahaney, leaders at the time, had become “increasingly uncomfortable” with the “People of Destiny International” name, and it was shortened to PDI Ministries. Tomczak left the leadership of PDI in 1998 and later suggested that the increasingly Calvinistic theology of PDI was a major factor in his departure. In 2002 the group adopted its current name, Sovereign Grace Ministries. Mahaney stepped down from the presidency of SGM in 2013, and in 2014 the newly-appointed director announced that the group name would change to “Sovereign Grace Churches” to reflect its newly changed structure. SGC still identifies with its original position of Reformed Theology and Continuationist Pneumatology and has consistently demonstrated an ecumenical eclecticism in its associations.

The popularity of SG music (as well as the music of Townend and the Gettys) has increased dramatically in recent years in large part because of the promotion it has received from Fundamental Christian


colleges and evangelists. It has now become an issue that, in some cases, is beginning to define ministries and individuals, particularly those that this issue of *FrontLine* is calling “Convergent.” It continues to be the number-one topic of conversation among church musicians and has caused considerable division in all arenas of ministry. Both authors of this article rarely see more than two or three days go by without a call, an e-mail, or a personal meeting about this subject, usually from someone who is unsettled about “the rapid changes that are taking place.” These discussions echo those that took place a few decades ago. Briefly


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Leading a Congregation Ethically through Change

Several years ago I led our church into a crisis. Yes, I made a mess. We had been holding double Sunday morning worship services for almost eighteen years. Our plan had never been for multiple worship services to be permanent. It was intended to be a temporary solution to a space problem on our way to building a new worship facility. When we finally held the vote to hire an architect, we got only 70% support. To put it bluntly, it was like a kick in the gut. Too many were opposed for us to move forward effectively, but too many were in favor to remain where we were. At that moment, I realized that while I thought the congregation was thinking like the leadership team was, we had not effectively communicated our vision. Our solution was to downshift—keep moving, but more slowly. We listened to the concerns of the congregation (fear of building cost, fear of debt, comfort with the present situation) and then began systematically addressing those issues in both teaching *and*

in church practice. It took us more than a year to help the congregation to embrace the vision of leadership move ahead. Had it taken several years, it would have been our responsibility as spiritual leaders to take the time necessary.

Downshifting and moving ahead patiently, focusing on teaching, is necessary more often than we care to admit. When making big changes such as building projects, school openings and closings, translation changes, Sunday school changes, and more, it is not only unwise, it is unethical to do so without teaching through the process. If a leader is convinced he should make a change, he should patiently teach to that change without insisting that he be followed without “murmuring.” Sometimes “murmuring” is not a sign of a spiritual problem, but a procedural one (Acts 6).

Some Considerations

Here are some considerations as you prepare: pay attention; be a student of the church’s culture. I am not talking about the culture outside your congregation in

the community, I am talking about the culture *inside* the congregation. This is especially true for a pastor who is new to a congregation. You are called to lead the sheep. That means that you must teach them to follow you. You cannot drive them, and you cannot just walk away from them. You must pay attention to what is happening. You must listen to what is being said. Deacons can be very valuable to a pastor in helping him to understand how people in the congregation are thinking.

As you listen, talk to people; understand their concerns. One of the reasons the seven were chosen in Acts 6 was so that they could listen and watch. They were to identify exactly what the problems were and address them. Pastors of congregations are supposed to be problem solvers. It takes listening to do that.

Hopefully, leaders can solve problems before they arise, but surprises sometimes happen. This was the case in Acts 6. Widows were neglected and people were murmuring. But instead of preaching a six-part sermon series on the sinfulness of murmuring and discord among the brethren (or the importance of being loyal to leadership), the leaders listened, identified the core issue, and addressed it. We can do damage to the flock when we treat all opposition as spiritual opposition. Not all church problems are spiritual problems; sometimes they are procedural ones. And not all personality problems are spiritual problems either. However, if I neglect my duty as a pastor while beating up the flock over a procedural or personality problem, I have made it a spiritual problem—my spiritual problem.

Examine yourself. Ask, “Why is it that I want this change? Is it essential, or am I looking for a magic fix for a different problem?” Causing division over a desired change is an unnecessary failure of leadership. For example, I have never yet seen a church become a better soul-winning church simply by changing its pulpit translation. Changing translations does not produce an atmosphere of evangelism where it doesn’t exist already. It may help, but it would be better to look first at our own hearts. First, ask yourself, “Am I a soul winner?” Churches will rarely become what their pastor is not. Better to address the personal issues first.

Pastor the church you have, not the church you wish you had. Do not treat an older congregation like they are all young people. You are called to pastor the entire congregation and address the needs of all of the people. Discarding older members because they cannot get with the younger program is dishonoring to them and to God.

Preach the process. We sometimes wait too long to make changes, and then when we do make the changes too quickly. Start with the biblical principles that are core to the ministry and reflect its historic values. It is unethical to take a pastorate with the intent to change that church from what it has been historically (unless that is what they specifically call you do to).

Build a team. Your goal as a pastoral leader is to build consensus and passion one layer at a time. Be honest about the primary influencers in your church. Every church has professed influencers and unprofessed influencers. Go after the real influencers in the congregation. Not just the deacons, but also the woman whom other women

gravitate to for counsel and spiritual guidance. Do not ignore them, include them—even those who might initially be opposed. If it is at all possible, get them on board, teach them and make them part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Make sure your congregational leadership understands the change well enough to explain it convincingly to others.

Engage resistance lovingly. Inform and energize supporters of the change in small groups. Make them influencers, not just cheerleaders. Engage resisters individually. This will allow them to speak with you more openly without the peer pressure of the larger group. It also helps to develop personal relationships. If they seem unresponsive to you, find someone who can connect with them.

Enlist “ambassadors of correct information.” It is amazing how much false information can arise quickly during a time of controversy in a church. Keep people informed, and encourage them to be ambassadors of correct information when they hear someone speaking in error. If your ambassadors create more resistance, assume they learned it from you.

Be willing to adjust. Sometimes it becomes clear that this particular change would be unwise for this congregation. Sometimes it is just not the right time. It is excruciating for strong leaders to make this adjustment, but pushing through when it is not right can destroy a church. There are also times when change still needs to be made, but not the change that was originally planned.

Appropriate Steps

After our 70% building project vote, we decided that we needed to take some unusual steps. We hired an outside consultant to hold small group meetings with our members. The pastoral staff was not present in these meetings so no one would feel intimidated. The purpose was to find out what the sentiment of our congregation really was, and what the primary concerns were. One of the themes that came back from those meetings was that we already had a mortgage on our facility, and people felt it would be unwise to build with an existing mortgage. We prayed through the problem as pastoral staff and deacons and decided to set aside building plans and to lead a campaign to pay off the present mortgage, which was small from our perspective (around \$375,000) but big in the minds of some people. The idea was that paying off the mortgage was something that everyone in the congregation could support. It would bring us together and would put us in a better financial position for future building. God tremendously blessed this decision. The people got behind this cause and we paid off the mortgage in eight months. That success energized the congregation, and we were able to move ahead into the building project with a much greater sense of energy and unity.

True pastoral leadership takes time, effort, teaching, adjustment, patience, care, and love. But it is not only worth it, it is also the ethical way to lead through change. If we have to drive away the opposition, we had better be certain that we are not the opposition ourselves.

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2016

October 17–18, 2016

Central Regional Fellowship
Wheatland Baptist Church
1139 McKinley, PO Box 99
McPherson, KS 67460

October 17–18, 2016

New Mexico Regional Fellowship
Scripture Baptist Church
140 Taylor Road
Las Cruces, NM 88007

October 24–28, 2016

FBFI Caribbean Conference
Calvary Baptist Tabernacle
PO Box 3390
Carolina, PR 00984

November 14–15, 2016

Southern California Regional Fellowship
Victory Baptist Church
10173 South Loop
California City, CA 93505
smithafbm@gmail.com
760.272.1350

November 17–18, 2016

Northern Cal. Regional Fellowship
Iglesia Bautista Fundamental
Morning Location
217 N. Grant Street
San Mateo, CA 94402
Evening Location
787 Walnut Street
San Carlos, CA 94070

2017

February 6–7, 2017

Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship
Westside Baptist Church
6260 West 4th Street
Greeley, CO 80634
970.346.8610
rockymtnfbfi@hotmail.com

February 13–15, 2017

FBFI Winter Board Meeting
Atlanta, GA

March 13–14, 2017

Northwest Regional Fellowship
Westside Baptist Church
1310 Echo Hollow Road
Eugene, OR 97402

March 20–22, 2017

South Regional Fellowship
The Wilds
1000 Wilds Ridge Road
Brevard, NC 28712

May 23–25, 2017

Pacific Rim FBFI Fellowship
Bible Baptist Church
714 Suson Street
Mandaue City, Cebu 6014
Philippines

June 13–15, 2017

97th Annual Fellowship
Maranatha Baptist University
745 West Main Street
Watertown, WI 53094

July 31–August 2, 2017

Alaska Regional Fellowship
Immanuel Baptist Church
7540 E. Cottrell-Campus Dr.
Palmer, AK 99645
907.745.0610
<http://www.akbeb.com/akfbf.html>

An Interview with Dr. Vaughn on Current Trends in Fundamentalism

(Continued from page 11)

reasonable to interpret that statement in the larger context of our complete body of defense over many years and not, as is sometimes done, in the context of a few embarrassing resolutions in the past, or in rambling blog threads that attempt to parse the words used in our Vision Statement. In ten years, I pray that many of the recent seminary graduates and church planters that I meet around the country who are genuine separatist Fundamentalists—FBFI men, in the best sense of the term—would actually find their way into FBFI and take it into the future as their own. I would hope there is someone among them who would take the role I now have the honor of holding.



What is the greatest contribution the next generation can make for the cause of Fundamentalism?

Thank you for this question; it is, in my opinion the most important question of all. First, learn the history of Fundamentalism and foster a dedication to what it truly stands for. If people are resistant to identify as Fundamentalists because of the misuse or unpopularity of

the term “Fundamentalism,” they would make a valuable contribution to the defense of truth and its biblical application to find a self-identifying term that is not a denial of separatism. Be like the first Christians, who were called “Christians” as a term of derision. Bring honor to the term, but don’t change your position or practice because of it. Find a way to strengthen each other without compromise or complaint that distracts from what our forebears called “the cause.”

I sincerely believe that if all generations of Fundamental men could get over the human craving to be a part of something “successful,” we could help each other within an organization such as FBFI simply by encouraging each other in every way possible. There will always be a remnant of God-loving, tender-hearted, clear-preaching, wise and humble men who will stand for Christ and the Bible. Would that every man of us in FBFI were such men, even though every such man will not be in FBFI. On the whole, the greatest contribution the next generation can make for the cause of Fundamentalism is simply to take the right stand with the right heart. In doing so, it will not be a generation that spends itself in an echo chamber arguing about what the words “right stand” and “right heart” mean. They already know. Thank God for them.

SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

First Partaker

Differentiating Holiness from Legalism

One of the most emotionally divisive issues between Christian brothers and sisters is something hotly labeled *legalism*. But ask nearly anyone to define what legalism actually is, and the explanation quickly gets vague. The old joke is that legalism is *anything to the right of me!* Worldliness is anything to my left. Unfortunately, in real life that's often the actual, nebulous scale by which Christians gauge one another's holiness.

At the root of this definitional difficulty is the fact that Scripture itself doesn't use the term *legalism*, let alone explain it. That's not to say that it's not a useful word. *Theism*, *millennialism*, *liberalism*, and many other such religious words are also terms which we find to be helpful even though they're extra-biblical. But whenever there's a debate about the appropriateness of the applications of these kinds of words, it's critical to the Church's unity that we agree upon their meanings. It's simply not righteous to define a fellow believer or his behavior with terms whose meanings he vehemently contests.

Toward an Understanding

Conventional usage employs the word *legalism* for describing a *misuse of law*; more narrowly, misusing God's Law. We seem to have two kinds of misuse in mind.

First, there's the use of law(s) in any way whatsoever to attempt attaining justification. This is the misuse which Scripture explicitly exposes and condemns. It is described in Galatians 5:4b as seeking to be *justified by the law*, and then condemned in the strongest terms:

Christ is become of no effect unto you . . . ; ye are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4a,c). Obviously, therefore, Scripture allows for no differing opinions between true Christians about this kind of legalism.

"The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Tim. 2:6)

It's the second apparent misuse over which Christians tangle: using law(s) in sanctification. The most extreme critics of any use of law-keeping in sanctification are antinomians. But antinomianism, like legalism, can be a slippery label. It's often defined simply by etymology: *against (anti) law (nomos)*. Though handily describing antinomianism's general posture, this approach appears not to recognize its nuances. In a recent work entitled *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?*, Mark Jones traces the historical spectrum of antinomian theology. J. I. Packer helpfully summarizes that spectrum in his forward to the book.

Antinomians among the Reformed have always seen themselves as reacting in the name of free grace against a hangover of legalistic, works-based bondage in personal discipleship. Characteristically, they have affirmed, not that the Mosaic law, under which Jesus lived and which was basic to its own moral teaching, does not after all state God's true standards for human living, **but that it and its sanctions have no direct relevance to us once we have closed with Christ** [emphasis mine].

But in most cases dividing Christians over the issue of law-keeping in sanctification (the second form of legalism), the debates aren't really over the direct relevance of the Mosaic Law to believers. The controversy tends to be centered elsewhere. Here are five descriptions of legalism which illustrate this. In order to avoid unintentionally distracting our focus away from their content, I've omitted their authors' names. But all are respected, conservative Evangelicals. The emphases are mine.

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- One typical definition of “legalism” is “**an obsessive concern with rules.**” It may also be defined as “**a tendency to pay more attention to the letter of the law than the spirit of the law.**”
- You come up with your own rules for what is spirituality. For what it is to be a good Christian. The Bible’s not enough. You want to add to what the Bible says. And you come up with a list of do’s and don’ts that are not found in Scripture and make that the standard that someone must keep in order to grow in grace. It is legalism. . . . There is no church that is more immature in the world than a church that is legalistic. That comes up with its own lists about movies and lipstick and television and this and that, and this and that, and this and that, and this and that, that have nothing to do whatsoever with what Scripture has prescribed.
- Legalism is behavior motivated by the false notion that sinners can earn favor with God either before or after salvation, through legal means—obedience, ritual, self-denial, or whatever. . . . Legalism says, “Earn this,” whether it’s salvation or sanctification. Legalism says that the presence of certain behaviors or the absence of other ones can make us more favorable to God, more worthy in God’s eyes, than we might otherwise be.
- A Christian judges other Christians for not keeping certain codes of conduct that he thinks need to be observed. . . . Now, we want to make it clear that all Christians are to abstain from fornication, adultery, pornography, lying, stealing, etc. Christians do have a right to judge the spirituality of other Christians in these areas where the Bible clearly speaks. But, in the debatable areas we need to be more careful, and this is where legalism is more difficult to define. . . . As long as our freedom does not violate the Scriptures, then everything should be okay.
- To abstract the law of God from its original context. We are supposed to obey God because we love him, because he is the one who has given the laws. It is possible, however, to turn God’s law into nothing but a series of rules, and forget the Person behind them.

Though these descriptions were probably not intended by their authors to be technically definitional, they nevertheless contain elements that can be isolated analytically. Those identifiable components seem to include:

1. Obsessing over rules (biblical or otherwise).
2. Adding extra-biblical rules to the Bible as standards for growing in grace (or measuring its growth).
3. Attempting to ensure or improve God’s disposition toward us by rule-keeping.
4. Judging others by extra-biblical rules.
5. Keeping rules out of some motive other than love

for God.

What are we to conclude from these? Are they valid descriptions of misusing law in Christian living? Are they good tests by which to detect defects in someone’s understanding of gospel living? Do they legitimately critique a kind of legal, spiritual bondage?

As in approaching most, if not all behavioral issues, it’s vital to begin by differentiating between absolutes and excesses. An absolute wrong is something that is unacceptable in all cases. Idol-making, treachery, arrogance, injustice—these are wrongs absolutely and universally. But an excess is something that is wrong only to certain degrees or in certain amounts.

The question here, then, is whether these various descriptions accurately portray behaviors or attitudes that are misusing law or God’s Law *absolutely*. For instance, is it universally true that we should never judge the rightness or wrongness of our own behavior, let alone someone else’s, by standards which are not explicit in the Bible? Or that we should never attempt to influence God’s disposition toward us by our performances, good or bad?

Some Scriptural Components of Holiness (1 Pet. 1:14–17)

A passage in 1 Peter 1 furnishes a helpful touchstone for attempting to answer the questions before us.

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

Clearly, this is a call for scriptural holiness, complete with a quotation from Leviticus 20:7. Even a cursory glance at these verses yields certain impressions about components of that kind of holiness. I’m going to list a few of these and emphasize certain words for the sake of focus. For instance, according to these verses, scriptural holiness

- prohibits Christian conformity to pre-Christian **lusts** (14).
- would **inform** pre-Christian ignorance about those lusts (14).
- calls Christians to a holiness that encompasses the **totality** of their lifestyle (15).
- urges that **God’s** holiness is to be the standard for our own (16).
- confirms this Divine standard for our universal holiness from the *Old* (not just the New) Testament (16).
- motivates Christian conduct by the certainty that we shall be **judged by our works** (17).

- calls for Christian conduct that is motivated, at least in part, by **fear** (17).

Scriptural Balance

There are many important things that could be discussed about the details of these generalities. But we ought to be able to raise certain legitimate questions in light of these broad observations alone, beginning with questions about scriptural balance.

First, is it scripturally balanced, in light of a passage such as 1 Peter 1:14–17, to draw hard, absolute distinctions between the letter of biblical commands and applicational standards attempting to conform to their spirit? Is drawing up a list of *do's and don'ts that are not found in Scripture and [making] that the standard that someone must keep in order to grow in grace* **always** a misuse of law, a kind of legalism? It could be, of course, but is it always the case? In other words, is it the case absolutely, or only when done excessively?

For instance, Peter calls upon us not to fashion ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance (v. 14). But what is *lust*? Not in the abstract (1 John 2:16), but in concrete expression? Before conversion we are ignorant of the true nature of our lusts and of the ways in which the world pressures and constrains our conforming to them. We have to be taught and educated about these things. And not in clinical, lexical terms only, but through identifiable, cultural examples. Is it, therefore, always, categorically, a misuse of rules and standards for a church to describe and require certain things of its members—such as modest attire at its functions? Or is it nudging towards legalism for a Christian school to prohibit its students to listen to certain kinds of music or attend certain kinds of entertainments? For that church or school to explain that certain ways of dressing and certain kinds of music and entertainment are ways in which the world fashions itself according to ungodly lusts? Is it always a misuse of laws to educate about these things and to set standards of compliance for those who wish to grow out of conformity to the world in these areas? The question here is, again, whether it is scripturally balanced to label such extra-biblical standards as being always a sign of legalism?

Second, is it scripturally balanced, in light of a passage such as 1 Peter 1:14–17, to dismiss **entirely** the value of conscientious rule-keeping? Of duty-obedience? Is it entirely scriptural to say that anything we do that is motivated by anything less than love is a kind of legalism?

Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 urges, *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* Is this entirely legalistic ground? A kind of sub-gospel admonition that leads to a bondage of conscience that is unspiritual?

Conscience is the internal moral governor, provided by God's grace, to accuse or approve (Rom. 2:15). Is compliance with its verdicts **always** nothing

but legalism? To take a contemporary illustration, let's say that my son comes to me and says, *Dad, I've been so tempted the last few weeks to go with some of the guys to a sports bar on the other side of town. It's been such a struggle again and again not to give in. But the thing that has kept me from yielding every time has been the standards you set for entertainment and drummed into my head over and over again. My conscience just wouldn't let me go.*

Would I say to my boy, *Son, I'm glad that you didn't yield to the temptation, but I've just got to get something straightened out for you. Conscience isn't the right motive for obedience. Until you learn to obey out of nothing but love for me, you're misusing our family's standards. You're being a kind of legalist.* Is that what I would say?

John MacArthur wrote about this issue,

The danger of overemphasis is very real on both sides of this truth. It is not quite right to say, "We obey out of love for Christ . . . and **not** out of duty." Duty and love are not incompatible motives. A father provides for his children because he loves them. Yet it is also his legal and moral duty to do so. The fact that a man loves his children does not lessen his duty to them. The more he loves them, the more he will see the duty as a joy and not a drudgery. But even when the duty is a delight, it should not diminish the father's solemn sense of duty.

Our obedience to Christ is like that. Certainly we ought to obey Him out of a deep love for Him. And the sheer joy of pleasing Him should permeate our obedience. Yet we should never think of obedience as anything less than a sacred duty. Our love for Christ does not make submission to Him elective. . . .

Of course, because we are still fleshly creatures, our obedience is not **always** joyful. And so we must realize that even when our hearts are not brimming with the joy of the Lord, obedience remains our duty. We are to obey when it brings us pleasure, but we also must obey even when we do not feel like it. **Both** our love for the Lord and our sense of duty to Him should motivate this obedience. One must never cancel out the other.

I fear that the church in our generation is losing sight of the role of duty in the Christian life. Multitudes see "duty" as something altogether foreign to Christianity. Compliance with the commandments of Christ is deemed optional. If you dare suggest that obedience is mandatory, you will be branded a legalist.¹

Third, is it scripturally balanced, in light of a passage such as 1 Peter 1:14–17, to assure Christians that God's disposition toward us is **never** affected by anything which we do (i.e., our performance)? Since the cross, is all of God's pleasure in His people that which He takes in us objectively, as we are positionally "in Christ"? Does He derive no delight (or its opposite) as a result of our behavior subjectively? Does this adequately

account for the whole counsel of God on the subject of God's emotional responses to His people?²

Proverbs 11:20 states, "Such as are upright in their way are his delight." Is this "uprightness," here and in many similar Old Testament passages, only the imputed righteousness of Christ? Is it never the actual behavior, deeds, habits, or way of life of His people?

Does not God state explicitly that He has both positive and negative emotional responses to us (not just to our actions), depending upon what we are doing? Consider, for instance, the following statements.

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him (John 14:21).

If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him (John 14:23).

For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men (Rom. 14:18).

Wherefore, we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him (2 Cor. 5:9).

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing (Col. 1:10).

That as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more (1 Thess. 4:1).

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God (Eph. 4:30).

There are several other critical questions that could be raised about the scriptural balance of some of the current conceptions of what constitutes a misuse of law (or rules, standards, and penalties) in sanctification. But at this point I want to go to what seems to me to be the nub of the issue.

This seems to be the way to differentiate legalism from holiness. Not by focusing upon our relationship to laws, but by focusing upon our relationship to the Lawgiver.

The Heart of the Difference

The real dividing line that differentiates misusing law in sanctification from scriptural holiness may not lie where it seems to. Unquestionably, for some, keeping laws lies at the heart of their conception of spirituality. But for their critics, renouncing laws may lie near the heart of spirituality. So that, ironically, the critics are

snagged in the same snare: preoccupation with laws.³ The person who protests that it is legalism to require of him anything beyond what Scripture explicitly demands may be just as focused upon the letter of things as the person whom he judges to be a legalist. He may himself be a kind of reverse legalist—avoiding much of the spirit of the Scripture's demands by his insistence that he not be held accountable for anything other than its jots and tittles. And his critiquing of those whom he perceives to be legalists may be just as unscriptural a judgmentalism as theirs.

The true differentiation between legalism and holiness doesn't seem to be law itself. Then what is it? Perhaps one of the finest exposures of it surfaces in the parable of the prodigal son, particularly upon his return. He determines within himself, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:18–19).

Just ask two big questions. First, whatever his attitude about his father's commands had been before, what is it now when he says, *make me as one of thy hired servants*? Does that sound like he's going to be conscientious about keeping his father's commands? But on the other hand, does that sound like he's going to calculate minutely so that he's not expected to do a jot more than the explicit letter of those commands? In other words, does he sound now like either a legalist or a reverse-legalist? Doesn't his spirit sound exactly right? What has made the difference? Well, ask the second big question: What now is his attitude toward his father? *I have sinned . . . before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son*, he plans to say. Isn't it this new spirit toward his father that is the root of his new spirit toward his father's commands?

This seems to be the way to differentiate legalism from holiness. Not by focusing upon our relationship to laws, but by focusing upon our relationship to the Lawgiver. Focused in humility (not self-righteousness) upon the Lord Himself, a believer could not be anything other than conscientious about doing everything possible to please Him. His Father's will becomes his delight. ☞

¹ John MacArthur, *Law and Liberty: A Biblical Look at Legalism* (Northampton Press, 2013), Kindle edition.

² For a careful attempt to investigate scripturally the apparent antipathy between Divine impassibility and the Bible's vocabulary of Divine emotions, see Rob Lister's *God Is Impassible and Impassioned* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013). Lister doesn't discuss the relevance of that antipathy to the question of legalism.

³ For a perceptive analysis of how this takes place, see Sinclair Ferguson's excellent book, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, & Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016).

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Bring . . . the Books

The Crook in the Lot by Thomas Boston

Ask yourself if you would be interested in reading a book whose author demonstrates

a dazzling mastery of the text and teaching of the Bible; a profound knowledge of the human heart; great thoroughness and clarity in exposition; great skill in applicatory searching of the conscience; and a pervasive sense of the wonder and glory of God's grace in Christ to such perverse sinners as ourselves.¹

Add to this that he ministered to his wife who wrestled with years of continuing, severe depression. Most of their children died at a young age. The author himself was plagued by severe pains (probably from kidney stones). He described the final eight years of life and ministry as his "groaning years." But his people loved his preaching so much that they gathered under his bedroom window to hear him preach from his sickbed near the end of his life. If this author wrote a book about suffering, would you read it? His name is Thomas Boston (1676–1732); he served as a pastor in his native Scotland in the town of Ettrick for twenty-five years.

I like to call books like this "run, don't walk books"—that is, dash out to pick this one up immediately. If you want to see how the grace of God could labor in you in times of deep trouble, then you simply must read Thomas Boston's *The Crook in the Lot*.² Even a casual observer of our times knows there are perilous days ahead. You will find Boston's work to be like a "son of consolation," your traveling companion, for the many things you must suffer. This book will help you trust Christ and take up your cross.

During those last painful years, Boston wrote seven sermons that are compiled in this little work. Three of these centered on the text, "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?" (Eccles. 7:13). By careful applications of the Scriptures, Boston shows you how to respond to those crooked places in your lot in life. That response

is to be obtained only by faith, not by sense; for, it is the light of the Word alone that represents them justly, discovering them in the work of God, and consequently, designs becoming the divine perfections (17).

Evincing biblical clarity in his deep agony, Boston wrestled with the applications of Ecclesiastes 7:13. He showed that every believer is plagued with crooked places. All of us know Solomon's exasperating sigh, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccles. 1:14). "The crook in the lot came into the world by sin: it is owing to the fall" (21). But Boston uses hundreds of Scriptural examples to show how the Lord will shepherd

you through troubling events, illnesses, and assaults upon your reputation. He carefully develops the theme of God's sovereignty to show how "the crooks" keep you from evil.

In masterful fashion, the author shows how troubles attend the exercise of grace in God's children. For instance, Boston writes,

When Jacob found Leah, through Laban's unfair dealing, palmed upon him for Rachel, how could he miss a stinging remembrance of the cheat he had . . . put on his own father, pretending himself to be Esau (Genesis 27:19)? . . . He had imposed on his father the younger brother for the elder; and Laban imposed on him the elder sister for the younger (42–43).

The last third of the book is given over to instructions as to how to respond to "the crook." By careful meditations on 1 Peter 5:6, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time," Boston explains humility and the necessity of submitting to God's will. He labors to help the reader patiently wait for the work of God's mighty hand. "Settle in your heart, that there is need of all the humbling circumstances you are put in. . . . God brings no needless trials" (120).

In the words of James 5:11, "Behold, we count them happy which endure." In the final pages Thomas Boston leads you to long for the relief of the "due time" when God will exalt His own. "God will at length break in pieces the proud, be they ever so high; and he will triumphantly lift up the humble, be they ever so low" (159).

With our morning coffee in hand, my wife and I read this book aloud together over a few weeks. We will never look at "the crooks" the same way again. I believe this book will bring a profound change in your thinking as well. ☞

“. . . when
thou comest,
bring with thee
. . . the books”
(2 Tim. 4:13)

¹ J. I. Packer, "Introduction," *The Crook in the Lot*. Puritan Portraits (Kindle Locations 1455-1457). Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition.

² Also available online as a free download in various places on the Internet. For this review, I consulted *The Crook in the Lot, Living with that thorn in your side* by Thomas Boston. Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2012. This edition features an Introduction by J. I. Packer.

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Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. Far too often, well-intentioned believers interpret passages of Scripture according to contemporary beliefs rather than by the teachings of God's Word accurately handled ("rightly dividing," 2 Tim. 2:15). Such is the case with the biblical teaching concerning knowing the will of God.

Paul states in Colossians 1:9 that he unceasingly prays for the believing church members of Colossae that they "might be filled with the knowledge of his will." When hearing this expression, the average Christian thinks of what he has often been taught concerning "knowing the will of God" in relation to life's major choices: *marriage, career, job options, location, how many children to have*, etc. Now all of these life choices are extremely important, and it would be foolish to say that one should not be concerned about seeking God's direction in making them. However, passages such as Colossians 1:9 and even Romans 12:2 are not primarily concerned with these issues.

The first question relates to the One who would "fill" believers with such knowledge. Paul uses the passive voice of the verb "fill" instead of using God's name in the active voice ("in order that God may fill you"). Some translations render it, "we continually ask God to fill you." The present tense "being filled" conveys the idea of continuous filling; a once-for-all filling with knowledge is not sufficient, for the believer must continue to learn and grow. The subjunctive mood conveys the desire or godly wish expressed through Paul's prayers. "Fullness" suggests that divinely given knowledge should pervade one's entire being, including his thoughts, plans, purposes, and affections. Paul uses "fulfill" or "fullness" in "some crucial junctures" in this book (e.g., 1:19; 2:9–10), so it is likely that he has some polemic purpose in its use in relation to the false teachers/teachings—who may have used these terms or similar ones in their false doctrines.

What kind of "knowledge" does Paul have in view here? The noun "knowledge" (*epignosis*), like its verbal root (*epignosko*), adds the preposition *epi* to the simple verb, giving the idea of "additional" knowledge "upon" the subject. The noun can at times convey the concept of "complete or full knowledge"; whether it does so here is questioned by some (e.g., Moo). Still, the older interpreters who maintained that this word denotes "thorough, deep and accurate knowledge" are probably correct. The knowledge of which Paul speaks is used in the NT especially of the knowledge of God and of Christ. It is a knowledge that grasps and is able to deeply penetrate into its object—here, God. One in fellowship with God attains such knowledge, which then leads to deeper fellowship. (See the cognate verb in 1 Cor. 13:12, "know fully as I have been known.")*


The knowledge of which Paul speaks here is not abstract or merely theoretical—even Satan and unbelievers can have that. Paul does not speak of worldly knowledge or even of Gnostic-type speculations, but of the knowledge of God's will—what is right and what God expects of the believer living a godly life for Christ. Paul likely focuses especially upon the big picture of God's will in the revelation concerning Jesus Christ, His redemptive work, and His relation to the universe—as Paul will go on to elaborate in this book. Eadie (21) is correct to take the expression in an unrestricted sense:

**"Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth"
(2 Tim. 2:15)**

- Not limited only to "the plan of redemption" by Christ instead of by angels—as held by some Greek Fathers such as Chrysostom.
- Not limited to "the secret purpose of God," at times called by Paul a "mystery."
- Not limited to the "legislative will of God"—His commands for Christian living.
- It covers all the above—"the divine will as well in creed as in moral obligation"; what we ought to believe as well as what we ought to do.

The practical application of this knowledge to personal life follows in verse 10: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Paul does not here use "God's will" in the sense we often use it today for some specific direction for one's life. In fact, after that practical application, Paul adds at the end of verse 10, "and increasing in the knowledge of God."

The emphasis on the "will of God" in verse 9 is intended to be practical. This knowledge of the will of God is modified by a prepositional phrase: "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Knowledge of the divine will consists of, takes the form of, or is motivated by wisdom and understanding given through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is the correct idea of the word "spiritual," which most likely modifies both nouns—wisdom and understanding, as also does the word "all." Wisdom is mental excellence in the highest and fullest sense; it involves the ability to apply knowledge in a practical way in order to do what is right and according to the will of God. The noun "understanding" speaks of the ability to decide in particular cases.

When the Spirit-imparted fruits of wisdom and understanding are present, the believer is then "filled with the knowledge of [God's] will." 

* For the use of this noun "especially for the knowledge of God and of Christ as being the perfection of knowledge" (Lightfoot, 138), see Prov. 2:5; Hos. 4:1; 6:6 [LXX]; Eph. 1:17; 4:13; 2 Pet. 1:2, 8; 2:20; etc.

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt.5:8). In the postmodern age in which we live, man sees everything through his own eyes. Thus it is imperative for the believer to avoid getting caught up in this worldly philosophy but rather to see things as God sees them. In his *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones states, “In a sense there is a vision of God even while we are in this world. Christian people can see God in a sense that nobody else can. The Christian can see God in nature, whereas the non-Christian cannot. The Christian sees God in the events of history. There is a vision possible to the eye of faith that no-one else has. But there is a seeing also in the sense of knowing Him, a sense of feeling He is near, and enjoying His presence.” He continues, “Imperfect as we are, we can claim that even now we are seeing God in that sense; we are ‘seeing Him who is invisible.’ Another way we see Him is in our own experience, in His gracious dealing with us. Do we not say we see the hand of our Lord upon us in this and that? That is part of the seeing of God.” Concluding his thoughts he exhorts, “You and I are meant for the audience chamber of God; you and I are being prepared to enter into the presence of the King of kings. Do you believe it, do you know it as true of you? Do you realize that a day is coming when you are going to see the blessed God face to face? Not as in a glass darkly; but face to face. The blessedness is inconceivable, beyond our imagination. ‘The pure in heart shall see God,’ nothing less than that.”

Seeing God in Situations

One Sunday morning during his message, a preacher brought out an oil painting that hung on the wall in his office. Without giving them any information about the painting, he asked the congregation what they saw in the picture. Many shouted out, “A village off the water!” Another added, “A village in the jungle by the water and people with hollowed out canoes, ready for travel.” One man commented that it seemed to be a jungle clearing populated by needy, impoverished people. Others noticed only the simple church building surrounded by leafy palm trees. Each person answered differently, but each answered based on his own experiences. After listening to the varied responses, the pastor said, “Let me tell you what I see in the picture.” He went on to explain how he had been praying for a missionary friend who ministered faithfully in Suriname, South America. For eight years this pastor had been praying for the missionaries as they traveled from their mission station in Riccanau Moffo, down the Cottica River to the village of Amerikan Njan. Finally, after eight years of diligent intercession, the pastor heard from the missionary that two precious ladies had recently received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Some months later, when the mis-

sionaries were home on furlough, they presented this preacher with a beautiful oil painting of Amerikan Njan village—the very village the pastor had been praying for all those years. In God’s providence, several years later, there came an opportunity for the pastor and his family to visit that mission field, singing and preaching at that very same village of Amerikan Njan.

After the Sunday service, the mother of one of the young ladies who had received Christ walked up to the pastor, asking the missionary to communicate to this Amerikan preacher how thankful she was for his part in seeing her daughter come to Christ. After relating this entire story to his congregation, the pastor concluded by expressing to his people that what he saw in the picture was very different than what they saw. His perception of the painting was based on the fact that he knew these villagers. The message of the painting was clear because the message was meant for him. In much the same way, believers can see God only through the lens of Scripture—the message God has left for each of His children that they might see Him, might know Him, and might consequently learn to view life as their Heavenly Father views it.

Dr. William Rice, pastor of Inter-City Baptist Church in Allen Park, Michigan, once remarked, “A man that sees God gets like the God he sees, and the more you see of God the less you will see of the world.” Following a great victory, King Cyrus of Persia took as prisoners a noble prince, his wife, and their children. When they were brought into the king’s tent to stand before him, Cyrus said to the prince, “What will you give me if I set you free?” He replied, “I will give you half of all that I possess.” “And what will you give me if I release your children?” continued Cyrus. “Your majesty, I will give you all that I possess.” The king questioned him further, “But what will you give me if I set your wife at liberty?” Looking at the one he loved so dearly, the prince replied without hesitation, “If you will restore my wife to freedom, I will give you my life.” Cyrus was so moved by his devotion that he released the entire family without asking recompense. That evening the prince said to his wife, “Did you not think Cyrus a very handsome man?” “I did not notice him,” she answered, “Why, my dear, where were your eyes?” exclaimed her husband. She replied, “I had eyes only for the one who said he would lay down his life for me” (www.sermonsuite.com).

Augustine died not long after the fall of the Roman Empire in AD 410. There is a legend that says that he was once challenged by a pagan who held up an idol to him sarcastically and said, “Here is my god. Where is yours?” To which Augustine replied, “I cannot show

“To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, ‘A window shalt thou make in the ark.’”

Charles Spurgeon

you my God, not because He doesn't exist, but because you have not eyes to see Him" (www.soundfaith.com).

Seeing God in Scripture

The author of the following poem is unknown.

I see my Lord in the Bible
Whenever I chance to look.
He is the theme of the Bible,
The center and heart of the Book.
He is the Rose of Sharon,
He is the Lily fair,
Whenever I open the Bible
The Lord of the Bible is there.

Now He, in the Book's beginning,
Gave the earth its form.
He is the Ark of safety,
Bearing the brunt of the storm,
The Burning Bush of the desert,
The budding of Aaron's Rod.
Wherever I open the Bible
I see the Son of God.

The Lamb upon Mount Moriah,
And the Ladder from earth to sky,
The Scarlet Cord in the window,
And the Serpent lifted high,
The smitten Rock of the desert,
The Shepherd with staff and crook.
The face of my Lord I discover
Whenever I open the Book.

He is the seed of the woman,
The Savior, of virgin born.
He is the son of David,
Whom men rejected with scorn.
His garments of grace and beauty
The stately Aaron bedecked;
Yet He is the Priest forever,
Like unto Melchizedek.

The Lord of eternal Glory
Whom John the apostle saw,
Light of the Celestial City,
The Lamb without spot or flaw.
The Bridegroom coming at midnight
For whom all His followers look.
Whenever I open the Bible,
I see my Lord in the Book.

Seeing the God of the Bible makes a difference. "From the Westminster Teacher I gleaned this story of an artist's daughter who lost her eyesight when she was a baby. After her mother died the girl's father became her constant and affectionate companion. For years her blindness was considered incurable. Then a new type of surgery promised to restore her vision. Following the operation, as she lay in a darkened room with bandaged eyes, this one thought occupied her mind: Soon I shall see my dear father! When the days of waiting

had passed, the dressings were removed and at last she looked into the compassionate face she had so long desired to see. Trembling with excitement, she closed her eyes, and then opened them again to convince herself she was not dreaming. As the one she loved took her into his arms she exclaimed, "I've had such a good-looking father all these years and didn't even know it!" (preaching.com).

Seeing God in Sorrows

As one sees the Lord in the Bible, his help comes from Him (Ps.121:1). Eliphaz states, "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). The believer will have afflictions, but those very afflictions will bring a believer closer to God as he leans completely on the arms of God (Ps.119:67, 71). Another unknown writer illustrates this truth.

I came to the valley of sorrow,
And how dreary it looked to my view.
But Jesus was walking beside me
And sweetly we journeyed through.

And now I look back at that valley
As the best of the paths I have trod;
For I learned to lean on the arms of my Father,
I learned to lean on the arms of my God.

Susannah Spurgeon said, "I remember once reading words to this effect: that the moment we come into a trial or difficulty, our first thought should not be how soon we can escape from it or how we may lessen the pain we shall suffer from it, but how we can best glorify God in it and most quickly learn the lesson that He desires to teach us from it. Had we grace and faith enough to do this, all our trials and troubles would be but as so many steps by which we should climb to the mountaintop of continual fellowship and peace with God. The soul that has learned the blessed secret of seeing God's hand in all that concerns it cannot be a prey to fear; it looks beyond all second causes straight into the heart and will of God and rests content because He rules" (maidensformodesty.com).

My mother, Jeanette Lyster Love, illustrated this principle throughout her life. At the age of thirty she contracted polio, leaving her paralyzed on her left side from the waist down. Over the next decades of her life my mother struggled with one physical difficulty after another. Not only did she face the daily limitations with which polio left her, but she also suffered multiple broken bones and finally breast cancer. In the summer of 2015 we discovered that the cancer had returned, attacking her liver and leaving her just a few months to live. On October 20, 2015, at the age of ninety-three she entered the presence of her Savior, rejoicing that she was finally able to meet the One whom she had served joyfully for over seventy years. After her death I read a collection of thoughts that she had left for her family. Included was the following: "I love Jesus and you all. What accidents that has happened to me was all to God's Glory." My mother lived life not seeing the afflictions, but seeing God in the afflictions. ☺

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When it comes to helping a friend, some people will stop at nothing. —Unknown

No one, until the past two hundred years or so, tried to say, "I am a Christian, but at the same time I believe the Bible to be full of errors." —Francis A. Schaeffer

Some of the teaching errors of today are really unchallenged errors of yesterday. —John Ankerberg

We are rapidly becoming part of the world and falling into the snares of "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Nay, and we glory in this as "progress," "culture," and "enlightenment," as freedom from the bigotry of other centuries and the narrowness of our half-enlightened ancestors, who did not know how to reconcile contraries. —Horatius Bonar

False teachers . . . handle holy things with wit and frivolity rather than with fear and reverence. —Thomas Brooks

In the day in which we live, we have had many preachers who have shone forth in public view as blazing stars and comets, who have professed superior light, zeal, and usefulness to all others, who have been swollen with vanity and pride and had their own peculiar phraseology. —Samuel Eyles Pierce (1746–1849)

My troubles diminish in the enduring, but my consolations are of another nature. . . . I look a little further, and my afflictions are no more; I look a little further and infinite consolations are mine for evermore. —James Meikle

They say such nice things about people at their funeral that it makes me sad to realize that I'm going to miss mine by just a few days. —Garrison Keillor

We have never had so many high-priced clothes hung on so many low-priced people as we do today. Behind all our trouble is cheap character. —Vance Havner

The charismatics' inadequate concept of the nature, function, and interpretative rules of the Bible have often left them wide open to mysticism. —Arthur L. Johnson

The teaching of the New Testament is quite clear about this, that there is an absolute foundation, an irreducible minimum, without which the term "Christian" is meaningless, and without subscribing to which a man is not a Christian. —D. M. Lloyd-Jones

Some of the confusion regarding the place of human reason in Christianity has resulted from the similarity of the two terms, *rationality* and *rationalism*. . . . Reason, or *rationality*, is God's good gift. *Rationalism* is a theory that says that man has in himself the ability to discover all truth without the aid of God. —Arthur L. Johnson

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest expression every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not *confessing* Christ, how boldly I may be *professing* Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace, if he flinches at that point. —Martin Luther

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.



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A photograph of a dining table with wine glasses and a napkin. The background is blurred, showing a restaurant setting with a white tablecloth and a napkin. The foreground shows two wine glasses, one in the foreground and one slightly behind it, both containing a light-colored liquid. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a pleasant atmosphere.

Randy Jaeggli

Christians and Alcohol

A Scriptural Case for Abstinence

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Preface

Drinking alcohol is the single greatest substance-abuse epidemic in American society. Governmental statistics annually reveal that a shocking percentage of major crimes committed in the United States such as assault, rape, and murder are fueled by alcohol. Billions of dollars are lost each year due to damaged health, work absenteeism, and automobile accidents caused by alcohol abuse.

Regularly the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, an esteemed publication for those engaged in college teaching and administration, reports with clinical accuracy and carefully supported research the rising plague of constant alcohol abuse and chronic binge drinking by students on college and university campuses across America. Even the calmest assessments present the facts as a monstrous problem.

To these disturbing assessments may be added the fact that the business, professional, social, and recreational spheres of life in America are infused with the casual and constant consumption of intoxicating alcoholic beverages. It is a normal part of virtually all social occasions of any kind, from casual evenings out to well-planned parties, from christenings to weddings, from birthdays to anniversaries, from promotions to retirements, from Christmas parties to funerals. Drinking alcohol is, in fact, a cultural expectation—if not a requirement—for the sophisticated American adult.

The discerning Christian can confidently assert that drinking alcohol to the point of impairment or even serious intoxication is a normal and accepted sin of “the world,” to use biblical language that describes those who follow current cultural mores. The “world’s” behavior naturally follows, since most in America, though nominally Christian, relegate God and the Christian morality taught in the Bible to a relatively peripheral part of their concern or experience.

What should be alarming to the Christian is not that the world acts like the world with alcohol, but that the church has begun acting like it. Recent surveys of evangelical college students show that well over ninety percent see no problem with the consumption of alcohol socially, while thirty years ago similar surveys revealed that virtually all evangelical and fundamental college students believed total abstinence from alcohol consumption was the right practice for a Bible-believing Christian.

Today, students from even the most conservative, biblically-focused Christian colleges are “rethinking” their view of drinking. They wonder, “Does Scripture really forbid drinking alcohol? There seem to be positive statements about it in the Bible. Even Christ turned water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana. Isn’t drinking alcohol permissible according to Scripture as long as it is done in moderation?”

In this book, *Christians and Alcohol: A Scriptural Case for Abstinence*, Randy Jaeggli of the Bob Jones University seminary faculty answers these questions and many more. Step by step, he shows with meticulous biblical evidence, medical facts, historical discussion, and mature pastoral reasoning why the believer who is concerned about walking in purity and holiness should never drink alcohol.

Arguments in favor of drinking in moderation are refuted in this book. Claims that all the wine commended in the Bible is unfermented grape juice are shown to be false through the careful examination of terms used for alcoholic beverages in the Bible and the accumulation of the historical, cultural, and archaeological evidence from both the Old Testament era and the first-century world of the New Testament. Most importantly, Dr. Jaeggli shows irrefutably that what was consumed by believers in the first century was not the intoxicating alcoholic beverages of today and that their practices then are no justification for any level of alcohol consumption today.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of this book is the deft, scholarly modeling of how careful scriptural exegesis and correct biblical interpretation can give clarity to a

subject that at first reading the Bible seems to present in an unclear way. Dr. Jaeggli honors the God he loves and serves through this book by showing that He is the Light of the world on this topic, as He is on all others, and not the author of confusion. This book demonstrates that the Scriptures, the Word of God, are always sufficient to fully equip the Christian for life and service (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Stephen J. Hankins, Dean
Seminary and Graduate School of Religion
Bob Jones University

Introduction: Why Talking about Drinking Matters Today

I did not grow up in a Christian home. I first heard the gospel at the age of twelve (in 1964) while watching an evangelist on television. I had no idea that a Bible-believing church existed until some family friends invited us to one. The pastor was a gifted exegete: unfortunately, I never heard preaching that dealt with practical issues of how a believer's understanding of Scripture should affect his lifestyle—*unless the Bible stated the matter very explicitly*. I remember a series of messages on the book of Ephesians, for instance, in which the pastor took a strong stand against any form of sexual immorality (see Eph. 5:3–7) but completely glossed over the command to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). I remember when the issue of the Charismatic Movement stirred no small amount of controversy, but no one ever debated the question of whether or not Christians should drink alcoholic beverages. I suppose the people at church simply assumed that drinking was outside the realm of legitimacy for a Christian.

The Lord graciously gave me a keen appetite for reading and studying Scripture as I began my freshman year in college. The cultural environment in the early 1970s on a secular college campus was not at all conducive to Christian growth. Every day I found myself on the spiritual frontlines of battle. I needed to saturate myself with the Word and find camaraderie in spiritual warfare with a group of Christian friends. I joined an evangelical campus organization that emphasized aggressive witnessing to our fellow students.

It was not long, however, before I began to notice that my Christian friends and I had come to some different conclusions about practical issues of lifestyle. One day I was having lunch with some of these friends at a favorite campus restaurant known for its fabulous pizza. They ordered a pitcher of beer and quaffed with no apparent qualms. Then they noticed that I was not joining them in their choice of a beverage. It seemed to me that drinking on campus was a good example of the “unfruitful works of darkness” that a Christian ought to shun. I saw the disaster that alcohol was producing in the lives of unsaved students. Drunkenness was destroying their study time, fueling their sexual immorality, robbing them of their health, and sometimes even killing them in horrible car accidents. I wondered why a Christian would want to have any association with drinking.

We are new creatures in Christ, I thought, not worldly people enslaved by a mind-altering substance. Scripture instructed me in holiness of lifestyle and exhorted me to manifest a zeal for being like Christ instead of modeling my life after the world system (see 1 John 2:15–17). When I tried to explain my objections to my friends, however, they called me a legalist.

Problems associated with drinking on the secular college campus have certainly not diminished since the 1970s. Drinking alcohol produces consequences every year that “are more significant, more destructive, and more costly than many Americans realize,” according to a report by a task force commissioned by the National Institutes of Health (a branch of the US Department of Health and Human Services), which presented the results of a three-year study.¹ Please keep in mind that the following statistics represent what happens *every year* to college students between the ages of 18 and 24 as a result of alcohol consumption on American campuses:

- 1825 deaths from alcohol-related injuries, including car accidents
- 599,000 unintentional injuries
- 690,000 assaults by another student who has been drinking
- 97,000 sexual assaults or date rape
- 150,000 health problems

Scripture exhorts believers, “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. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness. . . . But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:12–14). If no other passage in the Bible addressed the idea of staying as far away as possible from enslaving desires and living like a child of God with a clear-cut testimony of salvation, this one would be enough to convince me to avoid the consumption of alcohol.

Since my college days I have seen an increasing number of believers decide that the issue of drinking is a matter of personal preference within what they perceive as a “gray area” of Christian liberty. Indeed, attitudes toward drinking have been changing in evangelicalism for more than fifty years. Even though throughout the first half of the twentieth century most Bible-believing Americans held to a position of abstinence, attitudes toward drinking began to change in the 1960s. James Davison Hunter analyzed a survey of what students from nine evangelical liberal-arts colleges and seven evangelical seminaries believed concerning a wide range of theological and moral issues. The largest change in students' views concerning standards of moral conduct involved the issue of drinking alcoholic beverages. In 1951 ninety-eight percent of students in these evangelical institutions agreed that it was always wrong to drink alcohol, but that percentage dropped to only seventeen percent in just over three decades.²

These statistics are remarkable. Any thinking person should wonder how such a global shift in Christian think-

Continued on page 34

Written and Compiled by Dr. Layton Talbert

THE STORY OF DAVID, PART 8:

It is frightening, the flotsam that can litter the wake of a man's life—even a godly man greatly used by God, who presumes on his privilege, abuses his power, and ignores the truth he knows. It can happen gradually, almost imperceptibly. Or suddenly in one stupid moment of stubborn selfishness. And, Scripture reminds us, it can happen to the best of us (1 Cor. 10:12).

The Setting

Reading 1 Chronicles 20:1 and 2 Samuel 11:1 back-to-back makes for a fascinating comparison. The first passage makes three statements: (1) in the spring, Joab led the army against Ammon and besieged Rabbah; (2) David stayed at Jerusalem; (3) Joab defeated Rabbah. The second passage makes only two statements: (1) in the spring, Joab led the army against Ammon and besieged Rabbah; (2) David stayed in Jerusalem. But where is the third statement about Joab's defeat of Rabbah? It doesn't show up until 2 Samuel 12:26. Everything recorded in 2 Samuel 11:2–25 is wedged between the second and third statements of 1 Chronicles 20:1. Chronicles (written much later) leaves it out. That is not a contradiction; it merely reflects authorial selectivity under the direction of the Spirit of God. It may also be viewed as something of a parable—that David's sin, shocking as it was, is later passed over in silence by the pen of grace; it had been dealt with.

Second Samuel 11–12 has thematic roots back in chapters 9 and 10. Those chapters displayed David's *chesed* or loving-kindness—his covenant loyalty to Jonathan and his covenant-like loyalty and kindness extended to Ammon. Those stories show a great deal about the quality and character of David. Yet when we arrive at chapters 11–12 it hardly seems like we're reading about the same man.

Here [chapters 9–10] is David acting kindly and loyally, there [chapters 11–12] is David throwing kindness and loyalty to the winds. Here is David controlled by his covenants and his memories, there is David driven by his glands and his secrets. Here David spares and mourns life; there he tramples and destroys life (Davis, *2 Samuel*, 134).

The differences could hardly be starker, yet it is the same David. Why this jarring juxtaposition of contradictions? It is a window into real life. The silver lining in this dark episode of David's life is that the events in chapters 11–12 are out of character for David. That may not be

much comfort in the short term, but it does help us adjust our perspective of the wider picture. None of this excuses these events. It would be perverse to twist this period of David's life into a justification of our sin. The point is that while these actions are out of character for David, they are nonetheless *in the nature* of David. These chapters put on startling display two countervailing realities: (1) the foul fallen nature that lurks within even the best of men, and (2) the graciousness of God that superabounds when we genuinely repent.

The Telling

The bluntness and sparsity of detail objectifies Bathsheba. "There is nothing but action. . . . No conversation . . . no hint of caring, of affection, of love—only lust. David does not call her by name, does not even speak to her. At the end of the encounter, she is only 'the woman' (v. 5)" (Brueggeman, *First and Second Samuel*, 273).

We've talked before in this series on David about analyzing characters and their role in a story. The protagonist here is David; he is at the center of the story, and virtually every verse has him acting or talking or being addressed. The antagonist? Certainly the Lord, through Nathan (12:1ff.). Literarily, Bathsheba is merely an agent; she is, of course, also at the center of the story, yet she speaks only one line of two words in Hebrew: "I'm pregnant." Uriah is a foil. He speaks little, but when he does the narrator paints this foot soldier as a model of duty and loyalty—everything the king ought to be. He refuses to enjoy pleasures and privileges and even rights that his comrades in arms are denied. He does so not just one night, but twice. He can even be trusted to unwittingly carry his own death warrant back to Joab. He is the antithesis of David.

So (11:17–27a), Uriah dies, Joab informs David, Bathsheba mourns her husband, becomes David's wife, and bears his son. And no one's the wiser, right? "But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord" (11:27, literal). This is the first time the narrator has paused to "moralize" or comment on the events of the story. This is also the first time God makes His presence and feelings felt by the reader, and in doing so it makes its own point: *the silence of God does not mean the absence or ignorance of God, and certainly not the approval of God.* The fact is, He is not silent; even if He doesn't intervene supernaturally in your circumstances, He has already spoken clearly and repeatedly.

HOW THE MIGHTY ARE FALLEN (2 SAMUEL 11–12)

The Mousetrap

But God's not the only one who knows. That's one of the great inconveniences of having a prophet around (12:1). We read 12:1–15 negatively, confrontationally; but it is profoundly positive because it depicts the "grace that pursues and exposes the sinner in his sin. . . . Not that God's pursuing grace is enjoyable. But what if grace did not pursue? What if Yahweh abandoned us when we succeed at sin?" (Davis, 149–50).

Nathan employs a mousetrap strategy. David is lured into rendering a just judgment in a fabricated situation—then the trap springs ("thou art the man!") as he realizes he has just condemned himself amid a poignant depiction of the true nature of his own sinful actions. But what is most arresting is how God describes David's posture—*our* posture toward God when we sin so flagrantly and knowingly. The Lord uses a stunning word of David, twice: *Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have struck . . . you have seized . . . you have killed. . . . Now therefore the sword shall not depart from your house because you have despised Me* (12:9–10, literal).

David? *Despise* God? The Hebrew word means "to hold in contempt" or "to have contempt for." The same word used of Goliath's disdain for David (1 Sam. 17:42) God now uses to depict David's contempt toward Him. That doesn't mean David consciously sneered at God. But you don't have to thumb your nose at a judge, or insult his mother, or spit at the bench to be guilty of *contempt* of court. All you have to do is *ignore* the court order and not show up; your absence communicates that it's not important enough for you to fool with, or you don't recognize the court's jurisdiction over you in this instance, or you're just not interested in submitting to the court's authority. All you have to do is *ignore* God, *ignore* His word, *ignore* His presence, and God calls it *contempt—despising* God.

This *contempt of the Lord* is the exact opposite of *the fear of the Lord*. Fearing God simply means *taking God seriously*. And that begins by *taking God into account*. Because the first thing we want to do when we are confronted by temptation is insert ear plugs and put on mental blinders. The fear of God takes seriously God's presence, God's words, and God's rod.

David's response? Genuine, heartfelt repentance (12:13a). How genuine? Read Psalm 51. God's response? Immediate forgiveness (12:13b); *however . . .* there will be consequences (12:14). Consequences are not a veiled form of punishment, or a sign that God is still holding a grudge. Consequences are simply the necessary ramifications of sin in a fallen world. Nathan specifies two: (1) the blasphemy of God, because when we think little of God, we cause unbelievers to do the same; and (2) the chastisement of God—the child will die. Why? We are not told. But just as David decided the fictitious lamb-grabber deserved to die (12:5), and just as Nathan assured David that he would *not* die for effectively having Uriah killed, God determined that nevertheless *someone* would die for David's sin, and perhaps the idea is even *in David's place*. Is it impossible that God is foreshadowing that another son of David would die for his sin, and ours?

The Aftermath

In 12:15–23, we begin to see the old David again, stretched out in agony and prayer for the life and welfare of another. And in 12:24–25, the gracious, free, and full forgiveness of God is on display. When we respond rightly to God's conviction and correction, He responds faithfully and reliably by dismissing our sin from His mind; it is no longer a barrier in our relationship to Him. God's providence in the birth of Solomon and His grace in choosing Solomon seem intended to signify that their sin, though terrible, was truly dismissed because it was truly repented of. In fact, look at the image of David that closes these two dismal chapters (12:30). Who could have guessed that David would end this episode with a crown on his head? That's the grace of God.

Chapters 11–12 are another window into the heart of David. It's not a pleasant window to peer into, but God means for us to. When we do, we find that even the heart of a David is still corrupt and fallen and capable of any sin. And if David's, then what of yours and mine? But these chapters are also a window into the heart of God. Chapter 11 shows us that there is no sin to which even this kind of man is unsusceptible in an unguarded moment. And Chapter 12 reminds us that there is no sin from which this kind of man—one who is honest and responsive before God—cannot successfully recover.



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Boiled in Tar

The violent and inhumane actions of ISIS have been well documented to date. Many of their acts have been videoed for their own purposes of propaganda. Yet it is crucial to understand what motivates their barbarism.

When ISIS executes members of Muslim countries, they do so because of some violation of Sharia Law. Recently twelve ISIS soldiers were executed for fleeing the battlefield. An unnamed source said, "The leaders were executed by their counterparts from the outfit as they escaped from battlefields in Mosul without fighting against the security forces. Because the leaders ran away, ISIS suffered heavy loss—both material and of loss of their men." This is a violation of Sharia Law.

Six men were publicly boiled in tar as hundreds observed for collaborating with US and Kurdish forces. Twenty-five people were dissolved publicly in nitric acid based on the accusation of spying. A document obtained by the Associated Press indicated that seventy percent of ISIS recruits had only a basic understanding of Islam and Sharia Law.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/isis-boils-6-men-alive-in-vats-of-tar-after-sharia-court-orders-death-sentence-168042/>.

A New Permissiveness

Bromleigh McClenaghan is an ordained associate pastor at Union Church of Hinsdale, Illinois. She has written a book entitled,

Good Christian Sex: Why Chastity Isn't the Only Option—And Other Things the Bible Says about Sex.

The last part of her title entirely misses the mark. She gives permission to the Christian singles to engage in sexual activity "as long as it is mutually pleasurable and affirming."

Her reasoning appeared in the *Washington Journal* as an op-ed piece: "American Christians sometimes conflate celibacy and chastity, too, which is a problem. Chastity is a virtue, related to temperance—it's about moderating our indulgences and exercising restraint. We're all called to exercise chastity in a variety of ways, though the details will vary given our individual situations."

Her reasoning is based more on her perceived fairness of a situation than what God has revealed.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/single-christians-can-have-sex-as-long-as-its-mutually-pleasurable-and-affirming-pastor-says-168372/>.

A Scientific Study on the Gay Gene

Scholars from Johns Hopkins University have release a new 143-page report on the topic of the gay gene. Their conclusion is that there is not enough "definitive, scientific evidence" that people are born with a genetic link to gay, lesbian, or transgender behavior.

The researchers gave several reasons for their conclusions. (1) Sexual orientation is proving to be fluid and not set. Many in their study changed their orientation over the course

of the research. (2) A study of twins (fraternal and identical) did not provide enough evidence and in fact could be considered an argument against the idea of genetic predisposition. (3) Neurological differences provided confusing results so that no conclusion could be drawn.

When questioned about his response to those on either side of the debate that would disagree, claiming bias, Mayer, the lead researcher said, "The bias is just toward science."

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/no-scientific-evidence-that-people-are-born-gay-or-transgender-johns-hopkins-researchers-say-168263/>.

After-School Satan Club

In an effort to provide an alternative to Good News Clubs, a group known as "The Satanic Temple" is attempting to offer an after-school Satan club.

The group's co-founder Douglas Mesner, who also goes by the name Lucien Greaves, gave the rationale for his efforts. "While the Good News Clubs teach children shame, guilt, and fear—that they will die and be tormented in Hell—the After School Satan Clubs will focus on art projects and education with no religious opinion inserted. . . . The program is merely created and operated by the Satanic Temple. There is no attempt to indoctrinate the children."

Good News Clubs have over 4500 chapters that meet in US public schools after class hours. Moises Esteves, vice president of USA Children's Ministries

for Child Evangelism Fellowship, commented that he thought the group was "yet another . . . PR stunt" from "another attention-seeking atheist club." While he opposed the groups, he also recognized they have equal right to be there.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/satanic-temple-launches-after-school-satan-club-in-schools-nationwide-to-counter-christian-groups-167332/>.

Kentucky Marriage Lawsuit

Kentucky County Clerk of Court Kim Davis is facing a new lawsuit regarding the issuing of marriage licenses. Mark "Chris" Sevier is suing Kim Davis, Governor Matt Bevin, and Kentucky Attorney General Andy Beshear.

According to the Liberty Counsel Sevier hopes to argue that he has the right to marry his laptop. The case has been deemed frivolous, but it demonstrates that when marriage is redefined, almost anything can be allowable. Sevier also filed a similar lawsuit in the State of Texas.

Kentucky Senate Bill 216 has been passed that exempts the clerk from having to give approval to marriages. In fact it eliminates all markings on the marriage license that require personal approval.

In a related news story, twenty-seven-year-old Elizabeth Ording filed a suit because she was denied the right to marry an animal.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/kim-davis-lawsuit-denying-man-license-marry-laptop-computer-166140/>; see also <http://christiantimes.com/article/kentucky-clerk-kim-davis-faces-lawsuit-again-for-denying-woman>

license-to-marry-an-animal/59705.htm.

Iowa Showdown

The Iowa Civil Rights Commission has taken interpretative steps that led to a federal lawsuit filed by the Alliance Defending Freedom.

The ICRC has published a brochure claiming that the expanding of civil rights protection in the State of Iowa includes it reach into churches "open to the public." As long as churches are open to the public (not members-only institutions) they will be required to allow people to use the bathroom that corresponds to their gender identity and not their biological identity. Furthermore, these churches may not say anything that may make gay or transgender people to feel uncomfortable while attending.

A brochure put out by the commission states, "Iowa law

NOTABLE QUOTES

There is no experience of conversion which will make you immune against the lack of reading the Word of God and prayer. When prayer fades out, power fades out. We are as spiritual as we are prayerful; no more, no less. —E. Stanley Jones

It is often our [God given] duty to attempt tasks to which we are conspicuously inadequate, in the confidence that He who gives them has laid them on us to drive us to Himself, and there to find sufficiency. The best preparation of His servants for their work in the world is the discovery that their own stores are small.—Alexander Maclaren

What have you been doing with your life? Is Christ living in your home and yet you have not spoken to him for months? Do not let me condemn you or judge; only let your conscience speak: Have we not all lived too much without Jesus? Have we not grown contented with the world to the neglect of Christ?—Charles Haddon Spurgeon

provides that these protections do not apply to religious institutions with respect to any religion-based qualifications when such qualifications are related to a bona fide religious purpose. Where qualifications are not related to a bona fide religious purpose, churches are still subject to the law's provisions. (E.g., a child care facility operated at a church or a church service open to the public)."

Such a position is clear violation of First Amendment Rights.

This article can be referenced at <http://www.christianpost.com/news/churches-sex-segregated-bathrooms-transgender-feel-unwelcome-closed-to-public-iowa-commission-166167/>.

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Compiled by Robert Condict, FBFI Executive Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

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ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

In my previous column I asked readers to let me know if they use the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as I do, to help them understand the King James Version. I'm still interested in your responses (mark.ward@faithlife.com).

I pointed to two KJV words I didn't know before I looked them up: "besom" and "chambering." And I noted that only one of those words appears in contemporary dictionaries ("besom"). To find out for sure what "chambering" meant in 1611, there is only one tool you can reliably turn to: the *Oxford English Dictionary*. When you run across words you don't know in the KJV, the OED is the best and most authoritative source.

But I want to dig a little further into the beautiful and time-honored English of the KJV. Because there is another category of words for which you need the OED—but may not know it. There are a number of words in the KJV whose meanings have changed over time but which we still use today. This can trip you up.

In my very first *On Language & Scripture* column I gave an example: Elijah says to the people of Israel atop Mount Carmel, "How long **halt** ye between two opinions?" (1 Kings 18:21). What does "halt" mean here? One hundred out of one hundred people I've asked, all of them lifelong KJV readers, have said, "'Halt' means 'stop.'" I thought the same for twenty-five years, until the OED helped me confirm my misreading: "halt" here means "limp," not "stop." It's like Jesus' statement in Mark 9:45: "It is better for thee to enter **halt** into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell."

It's not the KJV's fault that I read this wrongly; it's not anybody's fault. Language just changes over time—the language of the KJV itself is the result of centuries of linguistic change.

Does it matter that most Bible readers today think "How long halt ye" means "How long stop ye"? Does it matter that we're misunderstanding one little word?

Does it matter that we're missing the meaning of "commendeth" in Romans 5:8 (another example I've written about in a previous column)?

Does it matter that we're missing the meaning of "let us wait on our ministering" in Romans 12:7?

Yes! Fundamentalists are *Bible* people! *We want to know what God said!* We want to hear it and learn it and obey it and love it. What matters *more* than understanding and obeying and loving what God says?

That's why you need the *Oxford English Dictionary*. If you read the KJV, as I do all the time, you need the One Dictionary to Rule Them All! It will tell you what "halt" meant in 1611—and what "commendeth" meant, and what "wait on" meant. I wish I worked on commission for Oxford University Press.

Dr. Mark L. Ward Jr. works for Logos Bible Software; he is also the author of *Biblical Worldview: Creation, Fall, Redemption*, published by BJU Press.



Regional Report

Twenty-Fifth Annual Alaska Regional FBFI

The Alaska Regional was inaugurated in the summer of 1992 at Hamilton Acres Baptist Church in Fairbanks as a result of the vision of Dr. Hugh Hamilton. Burdened to bring like-minded brethren together for the mutual edification he had enjoyed with good men in FBFI, he led the way to establish what has been a consistent gathering in churches in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Soldotna, and Palmer for twenty-five years. God has provided, from the ranks of Fundamentalism, some of godly men to minister to us in these meetings. This year special presentations were made to Pastor Earl Barnett and Dr. Hugh Hamilton (received by his son Dr. Bruce Hamilton) to commemorate the 25th Anniversary. Their names were inscribed on a pedestal holding a handmade Alaskan Ulu bowl. The traditional Ulu knife and bowl are popular gifts in Alaska.

This year's meeting was held at Maranatha Baptist in Anchorage, where Charles England, FBFI State Representative and the host pastor, has faithfully served for a number of years. Pastor Earl Barnett continues to serve as the Regional Coordinator, and Ben Burtch also serves as a State Representative. This year we received solid preaching from Drs. Mike Harding and Will Senn as well as from FBFI president Dr. John C. Vaughn. The

ladies were greatly blessed to receive ministry from Jennifer Harding, and her music was a thrill to all. Highlights included Dr. Harding's timely message on "Same-Sex Mirage," and Dr. Senn's convicting message on true repentance drawn from the penitential Psalms.

Our meeting for 2017 will be at Immanuel Baptist Church in Palmer with Brother Burtch. Dr. Ernie Schmidt has committed to speak there, and others have been invited. Prior to the meeting, Dr. Vaughn spent a few days in southern Alaska with Pastor John Judson and also spent time fishing with grandsons David and Silas. At the same time, Dr. Steve Pettit and his wife, Terry, were passing through Ketchikan. Alaska is a vast state; from Anchorage, it is possible to travel a thousand miles

in three different directions and still be in Alaska! That is why it is so difficult for the men to come to the FBFI meeting. Bruce and Lena Hamilton travel from Fairbanks to Anchorage, a distance by car of about 375 miles. Earl and Joan Barnett fly from King Cove, which is over 900 miles away. They must fly, as driving involves half the distance by ship and a total travel time of 85 hours! When men attend from Ketchikan, they must fly, as the only overland route is through Canada, covering over 1650 miles! Those who are able to attend at all do so at great expense, but they treasure the time together.



Earl Barnett and John Vaughn



Hugh and Bruce Hamilton



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ing could possibly have taken place. Perhaps the primary cause is the development of a pervasive skepticism concerning authority that has developed in our culture since the 1960s. People have become much less likely to accept a particular standard simply because someone in spiritual authority over them asserts it to be true and proper. In our cultural milieu many people care little about what older people say or what conventional wisdom has long maintained as true. Probably an errant philosophy of Christian living that rejects specific application of the doctrine of separation from the world system has also taken its toll.³

The purpose of this book is to examine the issue as objectively as possible. Regardless of how this global shift in thinking has come about, those who imbibe alcoholic beverages today include sincere believers who want to walk with the Lord and please Him. There have also been some capable biblical interpreters who have concluded that drinking in moderation is within the realm of permissible conduct for the Christian. To say that the question about drinking has become highly controversial is an understatement for sure.

The purpose of this book is to examine the issue as objectively as possible. The reader has probably concluded (correctly) from this short introduction that I have personally adopted a position of total abstinence from alcohol as a beverage. The reader may also have concluded (incorrectly, I hope) that I am, therefore, incapable of handling the issue objectively. Please do not be quick to make that assumption!

My goal is to evaluate the question of drinking from an exegetical methodology. Exegesis is the objective process of drawing out from a scriptural text the meaning that the Holy Spirit intended. The admonition of 2 Corinthians 4:2, that the Bible interpreter must not be guilty of “walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully,”⁴ demands application of Scripture that rests securely on sound exegesis—not the interpreter’s imagination or what he would like Scripture to say. I hope the reader will carefully consider the validity of my methodology and conclusions and be persuaded in his own mind concerning what he should believe about this important subject.

Grammatical Interpretation

The process of accurately expressing the meaning of Scripture entails several key components.⁵ Lexicography, the study of word meaning, is of vital importance. Biblical usage determines meaning. The interpreter also studies the grammatical relationships between words in particular verses. Analysis of word meaning and grammar

yields the objective meaning the Holy Spirit intended His Word to convey. In the following pages the reader will find an analysis of the way Scripture uses various Hebrew and Greek words for “wine” and “strong drink.”

Historical Interpretation

We must be very careful, however, what we conclude from the study of word meaning and grammar. Were the alcoholic beverages that people consumed in the biblical period equivalent to what people drink today? Historical analysis is the second key component of proper interpretation, and it is absolutely crucial in the issue of wine usage. Why did people in ancient days drink alcoholic beverages? Were these beverages the equivalent counterparts of modern wine and beer, or were they diluted significantly before consumption? Are there historical disconnects between drinking in the ancient setting and drinking today? The answers we give to these questions are an essential component of correct biblical interpretation—they are not simply peripheral issues. I intend to show that ancient people significantly diluted their wine.

Beverages produced from grains instead of grapes, drinks that our English translations typically call “strong drink” or “beer,” may have had a concentration of ethanol as low as 0.5%. People in biblical days sometimes lacked sources of potable water that would not make them ill. Certainly some people in ancient days drank because they wanted to become drunk, just as some do today. Paul found it necessary, for instance, to denounce certain wealthy people in Corinth who were coming to the Lord’s Supper in a drunken state (1 Cor. 11:20–22)! But generally most people today drink much more intoxicating alcoholic beverages for different reasons, resulting in highly significant cultural differences between drinking in biblical days and drinking today.

Contextual Interpretation

Careful study of the context of a passage of Scripture is the third aspect of Bible study. If an interpreter does not do justice to context, his interpretative conclusions may be erroneous. I have a favorite illustration I like to

use with students in order to reinforce this truth. Fred is a new believer and has no idea how to study his Bible. A friend at church suggests that every morning Fred should take his Bible, close his eyes, open the text to a random page, place his finger on a random verse, open his eyes, and read his verse for the day. The first time Fred tries this method he lands on Mathew 27:5, which says, “And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.” Unable to discover the blessing in this verse, Fred tries the method again and

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lands on a verse that says “Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37). Putting the two verses together, Fred is quite puzzled and a bit alarmed! Still hopeful, Fred gives the method one last try. This time he reads, “Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly” (John 13:27). Three strikes and you’re out! Now Fred is convinced the Bible teaches the doctrine of rapid suicide! By taking verses out of context we could be guilty of crafting a doctrine that is entirely foreign to the true teaching of the Bible.

There is nothing wrong, *per se*, with building doctrinal truth by assembling verses from a wide range of passages, as long as one does not violate the contextual meaning of the verses. The Bible interpreter must also keep in mind that there are various levels of context, all the way from the paragraph in which the verse appears to the overall teaching of the entire Bible on a particular subject. So when we are examining verses that relate to the issue of drinking, we cannot simply pick out a few of our favorites that support our position and ignore a whole class of verses that do not.

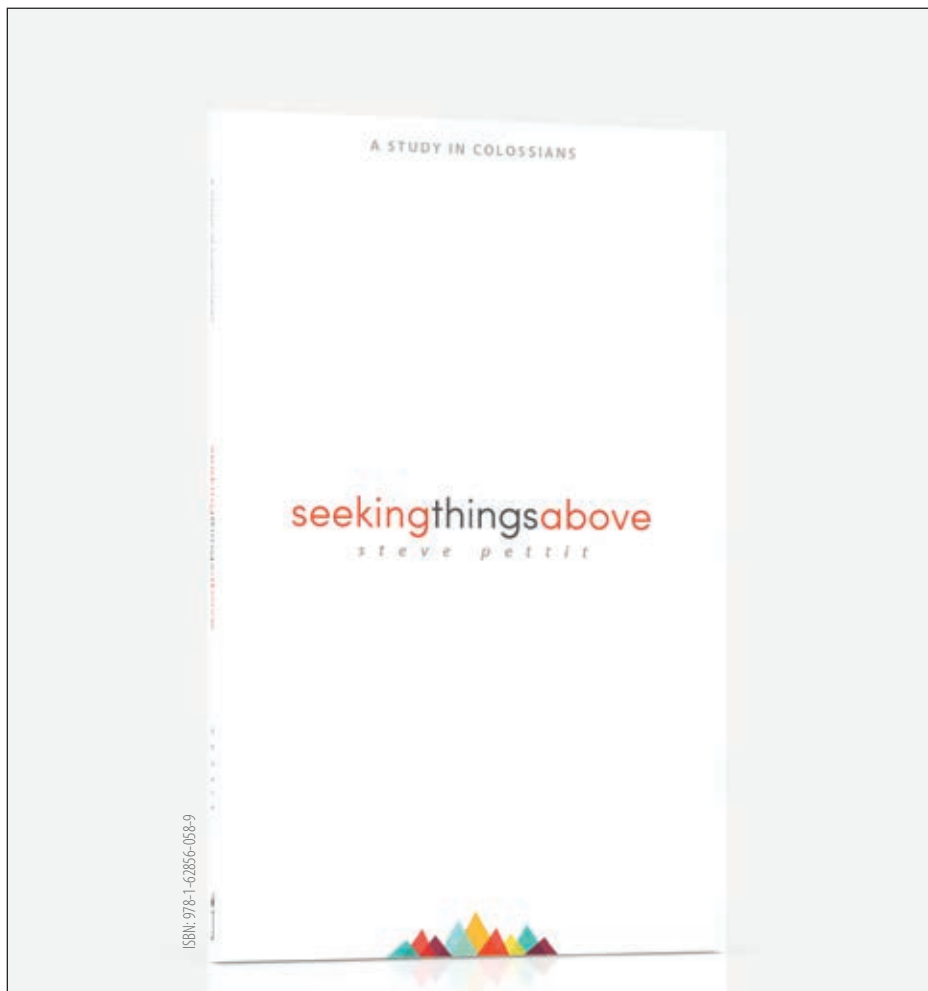
Theological Interpretation

The final aspect of careful Bible interpretation is theological analysis, which involves both biblical theology and systematic theology. Though there are some important differences between the two, they are both valid and essential. Biblical theology emphasizes inductive analysis—starting with the biblical data, looking for the function and interrelatedness of the data, and deriving general conclusions. It is also sensitive to the chronological development of biblical revelation as God progressively develops a subject throughout the history of the writing of Scripture. As a biblical theologian, I have approached the study of drinking from this inductive perspective, moving from specific information to general conclusions. Systematic theology enters the picture as a framework for an understanding of how the issue of drinking relates to the great doctrines of the Bible. We must always make ethical decisions in relation to how the gospel impacts the believer’s life. As Christians we must be striving for personal holiness by applying truths about Christ to the way we live daily. We must take our sanctification seri-

ously, instead of seeing how closely we can model the world system that is passing away.

A Sound Interpretative Analysis of the Biblical Data Mandates That Christians Today Refrain from Alcohol Beverages

So what does the Bible say? And how are we to apply what it says to the issue of drinking today? There is an apparent paradox in how drinking is presented in the Bible. Scripture sometimes states that wine is a blessing to God’s people (e.g., Ps. 104:15) and other times calls it



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a horrible curse (e.g., Prov. 23:29–35). Historically, some have explained this seeming paradox by maintaining that the “wine” the Bible mentions as a blessing is really grape juice. This is not the conclusion I have reached. I hope to persuade readers that a sound interpretive analysis of the biblical data, together within an understanding of the crucial importance of being good stewards of our bodies, mandates that Christians today wisely refrain from any consumption of alcoholic beverages.

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¹“College Drinking,” National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, accessed October 7, 2013, niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/special-populations-co-occurring-disorders/college-drinking. Statistics based on R. Hingson, W. Zha, and E. Weitzman, “Magnitude of and Trends in Alcohol-Related Mortality and Morbidity among U.S. College Students Ages 18–24, 1998–2005,” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* 16 (July 2009): 12–20.

²James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 58–60.

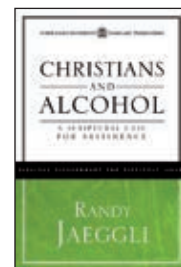
³Some contemporary Christians have misunderstood the Bible’s teaching on Christian liberty. They insist that it is legalistic to apply biblical principles to issues of Christian conduct not enunciated explicitly in Scripture. They have rejected the idea that the biblical doctrine of sanctification mandates a circumspect life of personal holiness. For a refutation of this distorted view of sanctification, see my book *Love, Liberty, and Christian Conscience* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2007).

⁴Philip E. Hughes observes that “while Paul speaks of the purity and candour of his ministerial conduct, it is evident from the whole context of this epistle that he does so not out of concern for his own reputation, but rather that by implication he is contrasting himself with others whose behavior has been inconsistent with their claims to be ministers of Christ” (*Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962], 122). The Greek word translated *handling deceitfully* is δολω, to “falsify” or “adulterate” (W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957], 202). These crafty preachers were guilty of the “wresting of passages from their context and their misapplication” (*ibid.*, 123).

⁵The discussion that follows describes the

exegetical process in a general overview, but readers who desire a more in-depth description may want to read Walter C Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981). My overview loosely follows Kaiser’s presentation.

Christians and Alcohol: A Scriptural Case for Abstinence by Randy Jaeggli is available from journeyforth.com.

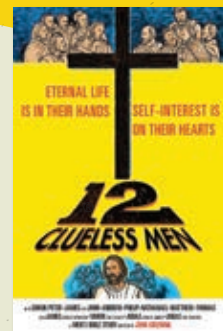
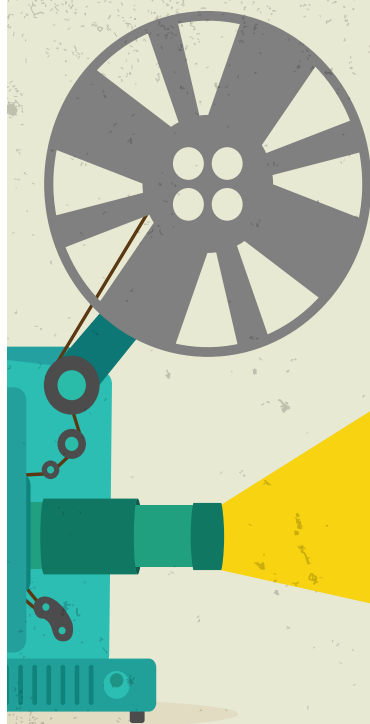


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Approving Things That Are Excellent: Discernment in Music

(Continued from page 17)

stated, the two positions, now, as then, are “clean it up and use it” vs. “stay away from it entirely.” That is a debate that cannot occur in this space. But knowing it exists supports the basic premise of this article: believers need discernment. We have been known for nearly seventy years as Separatists because the New Evangelicals, as they sought to engage the culture, began to embrace the culture. We refused. Today, the spirit of New Evangelicalism animates some within a new generation of Fundamentalists. Seeking to engage the culture, they too, are embracing the culture. They seem to have lost interest in separation and to have become enamored of its opposite—Convergence. It is evident in their music.

An Appeal

It is never enjoyable to be part of a controversy. We take no pleasure in the unpopular position. Our remarks are offered mostly as an appeal to ministry leaders—leaders of churches and colleges—our friends, whom we hold dear. We are deeply concerned for the upcoming generation they are influencing, failing to warn them of the danger Convergence certainly brings. The paradox we see in this is the probable source of this music’s popularity. We understand the feeling among our peers, that “finally some music has come along that is both fresh in its sound and rich in its doctrine!” Our initial reaction was the same. We understand why folks are frustrated when something comes along that is, in so many ways, *so* good and someone else comes along and opposes it! We should never oppose anything just because it is popular or new. Neither should we reject a sincere appeal just because we are biased against what it would require of us.

In the final analysis, the paradox exists in the probable reason that the younger generation is embracing so much of the SG music. Dear reader, simply put, this is another *fad*. In the same way that giving permission to use Steve Green’s music a generation ago opened the door for stumbling, a new stumbling block is being set before a new generation. This time it

is embedded within Sovereign Grace and its related personalities. Of course, this is not a blanket indictment, nor does it describe all young Christians, but it is not the uninformed listener that we risk losing here. SG is not the root problem; it is just a catalyst of Convergence. If we fail to warn of the danger in SG music, it will become the justification for using something far worse. Moreover, if SG music is being used as part of a Convergent agenda, its use would demonstrate all the ethical problems of that direction.

We would urge the leaders of Christian colleges and schools to interact with their music and Bible faculties and to develop a clear position on music, as on any other contentious issue, for the well-being of the students. Even then, inconsistency in the application of institutionalized principles will eventually confuse and possibly destroy young believers. No one song or movement, including SG, will destroy. But a lack of discernment will not recognize destruction until it may be too late. We find it hard to fathom that Fundamental leaders are unaware of what they are doing, but we shudder to think that this direction could be strategic! Separation has its problems, but Convergence is not the answer. If there is a real thirst for doctrinally sound and fresh sacred music on the part of the students and the youth group, that need can be satisfied through sources other than SG. The claim that “nothing else will reach them and hold them” is indicative of a carnal craving, not a spiritual thirst.

A final thought: in today’s deteriorating culture, with the availability of so much knowledge coupled with so little discernment, I would argue that only biblical discernment will lead us to genuine biblical liberty—the exclusion of even acceptable things because of questionable associations and even the things that are acceptable in themselves that foster an appetite for what is clearly unacceptable. Perhaps the need for discernment has never been greater. Without it, we will become weaker and weaker in approving things that are excellent.

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God Is Big on Personal Responsibility

Jerry Sivnksty

There is a solemn teaching from the Word of God that must be emphasized among God's people. We are living in a day when many individuals blame everything and everyone for actions for which they alone are responsible. For example, some people will not pay taxes because they believe the government is wasting their tax dollars on projects or programs that they do not agree with morally or philosophically. However, Jesus said in Matthew 22:21, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." We are responsible as American citizens to pay our taxes—that is the biblical thing to do.

Another example would be of someone who crashes his car into someone else's car and then leaves the scene of the accident because his insurance has run out and he doesn't want to pay for the damages. That is inexcusable! Another example would be of people who smoke for years and end up getting lung cancer—and then sue the tobacco companies.

The list is endless of people who use the cliché of "passing the buck." This goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. When the Lord created this couple, He placed them in the Garden of Eden to tend and enjoy all that was in it. He gave them only one restriction: they were not to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, Genesis 3:6 tells us, "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." The Scriptures then tell us that their eyes were opened; they realized they were naked, and they hid from God. When the Lord confronted Adam and Eve and asked them in Genesis 3:11, "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" Adam responded by blaming his Creator in verse 12: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Adam was saying in essence, "If you hadn't given me that woman, I wouldn't have eaten of the tree. It's not my fault!" And how did Eve respond when God questioned her? She told Him in verse 13, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." She, too, was shifting the blame and basically said, "It's not my fault! The serpent is the one who's responsible; this wouldn't have happened if it weren't for him."

Adam and Eve would not take responsibility for their sinful actions.

We find many more examples of this in the Old Testament. When Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from the Lord, the children of Israel grew impatient because he was gone for so long. So they said to Aaron in Exodus 32:1, "Up, make us gods,

which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." Aaron said in verse 2, "Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me." Aaron took all the gold and made a golden calf, and the people began to worship it. When Moses came down from the mount and saw what was happening, he was so infuriated that he burned the golden calf, ground it into powder, and threw it into the river; then he made the people drink it. When Moses then confronted his brother in verse 21—"What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?"—Aaron replied in the next verse, "Let not the anger of my lord wax hot; thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief." In other words, "This is a hard bunch to control!"

Blame-shifting is egregious to the Lord; He holds individuals accountable for their actions, just as He did with Aaron. We read in Exodus 32:35, "And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made." Sometimes a person will pay a horrific price for not doing exactly what the Lord has commanded him to do. Personal responsibility is not something He takes lightly.

We have the solemn account in Numbers 20 of Moses leading the children of Israel through the wilderness when they ran out of water. The Lord told Moses in verse 8, "Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink." But Moses did not do what the Lord instructed. Moses was angry with the people and said in verses 10–11, "And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also." Instead of speaking to the rock as God had decreed, Moses struck it twice with his rod. Now observe the consequence Moses paid for disobeying the Lord. We read in verse 12, "And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." One of the greatest leaders in the entire Old Testament paid a great price for not heeding the Lord's command.

This ought to be a very serious warning to all of God's children. Remember, the Lord is big on personal responsibility!

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