

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

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“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.
For I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.”

Acts 20:26-27, NKJV

From the Editor's Desk

DYLAN STEWART - 01 MARCH 2024

It is with great joy we present the fourth edition of *The Whole Counsel of God*. As another new month arrives, we thank God for His continued longsuffering and unmerited favor He extends towards us. Truly, the Psalmist was right as he mused to God, "What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?" (Psalm 8:4). We are blessed beyond measure to simply be in the mind of God.

Multiple articles in this month's edition of the journal focus on the responsibilities of those preaching the gospel. As each year passes, I feel that my generation and the generation after me needs to hear these types of lessons with increasing frequency. I recall a statement made by brother Charles Maples back in the late 2000s that has stuck with me all these years later. Mr. Maples said he was concerned with how many young men desiring to be "pulpit preachers" were being taught how to preach (that is, how to be a good speaker) without being taught what to preach. Brother Maples' point was that, when it comes to determining who is a sound preacher, it does not matter how good a public speaker a person may be (1 Cor. 2:1-5), if he is not preaching the truth or is unwilling to teach the most needed parts of it (Acts 20:20,27), then his preaching is useless. Certainly, the scriptures support this sentiment, and the articles included this month delve deeper into what I believe is a very grave issue looming over the church.

Also included this month is an in-depth article examining if the Bible authorizes a Christian to drink in alcohol in moderation. I believe this article does an excellent job answering a question that continues to divide brethren.

We pray these articles and all other articles included in this edition of the journal will be of great spiritual benefit to all who read. Thank you for your continued encouragement. Please keep us in your prayers as we daily strive to fight the good fight of faith.

(DTS)

The Whole Counsel of God is published monthly by Dylan Stewart. All correspondences should be submitted via the **Contact Form** found [here](#).

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The High Cost of Generic Preaching

DICKEY HOWARD | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

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Preaching the gospel is not an easy task. It is not easy, nor pleasant, to give the people what they need to equip them to be strong and stand for the truth. And preachers, like everyone else, can grow weary in well doing. Thus some drift into generic preaching. It is not only easier, but it pleases the crowds and the congregation seems at peace. Generic preaching pleases many elders because they, same as the preacher, grow weary of the effort that goes with distinctive Bible preaching and teaching.

When I talk about “generic” preaching I mean (1) opposite of distinctive preaching, (2) the preaching of general sermons with no specific application given, (3) preaching the “smooth” things to make people feel comfortable, (4) sermons that never make one feel he needs to make changes in his life, (5) no controversial, nor militant lessons, (6) not laying it on the line, (7) preaching like water, seeking the path of least resistance.

I did not say generic preaching was teaching of error, but one can preach these type lessons week after week, never teaching any error, while starving a congregation to death. Many preachers are giving the pew what they want instead of what they need. We ask ourselves why so many preachers are embracing this type preaching?

In his book, *The Kingdom Of Promise And Prophecy*, R.L. Whiteside told the story of a man talking to a gospel preacher. The man asked, “Why do we not have great gospel sermons like those we used to hear?” The reply was, “There is no demand for them.” He went on to ask, “Have we reached the point where preaching is trimmed down to

fit the demands of the times?” Cary McMullen, a newspaper writer, wrote an article in the *Times Daily* of Florence, Alabama stating, “Many Americans are selecting a place of worship where they feel comfortable.” The results of a George Gallup, Jr. poll stated, “Too often the faith professed by folks is superficial, with people not knowing what they believe or why.” He further stated, “Americans tend to view faith as a matter between them and God, to be aided, but not necessarily influenced, by religious institutions.” I am sure all those surveyed were not members of the church, but this is the same attitude expressed by many of God’s people.

God intends for each individual to examine the things taught in light of his word. Bible knowledge is the Christian’s defense against apostasy, sin, and false teachers. But in the real world, we all know that when people are as busy as most are today, Bible study suffers. Many begin to seek the minimum they can do. They do not want to hear preaching that demands something of them. The demand of the day becomes “watered down” preaching. And there always seems to be some preachers ready to answer the call, while some elders allow, and even encourage it.

As with most seeds, the seed of apostasy needs prepared and fertile ground. And history has proven that one of the best ways to prepare a congregation for apostasy is for preachers to become lax in preaching the whole council of God, and begin preaching general sermons. I do not believe any of those preaching such have the intention of allowing sin and error to creep into the flock. In fact,

they believe they are doing what is best for the congregation. But, once a congregation becomes accustomed to the peace and harmony of generic preaching, they will become soft and unprepared for battle. They become easy prey and will watch the battles from their seat on top of the fence.

Look around at the congregations that once were known for “strong” distinctive preaching and members that answered the battle cry when danger threatened, but today cry neutrality or church autonomy when issues arise. They know the truth, but many don’t want to go through the stress of battle because they have become weak from a lack of solid food. But, does the Lord really allow any to remain neutral during a battle for truth? *“In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them” (Obad. 10)*. Do they not know the deafening sound of their silence speaks loud and clear of the side they have chosen? Yes, they have become as one of them, whether they like it or not. Thus, we see the lack of distinctive Bible preaching taking its toll today. The division that the church is experiencing today is a good example. Many in the Lord’s church do not even know there is a division among us. Many preachers choose to not preach about the issues because they say, “We don’t have that problem here, and we just don’t preach about it.” The best way to have a problem is not to preach about it.

Because so many, even in the “conservative” ranks, tend to think liberally about such things as dress, attendance, dancing, social drinking, marriage, divorce and remarriage, creation, God’s grace,

mixed swimming, the role of the elders, church autonomy, who is a false teacher, and even baptism, this type thinking is allowed to exist because of generic preaching! All that is needed for them to apostatize is for a preacher to get up in the pulpit and agree with them, or at least find a loophole. And some preachers have already answered the call, loud and clear, by teaching that some moral and doctrinal matters can be fellowshiped using **Romans 14**. This allows fellowship of all the above and much more. If not, how do we choose what to leave out? This false doctrine has such far reaching consequences that we can only imagine what it will affect, even in future generations. Already a great price is being paid because of the division this false teaching has brought among us. Many preachers that stood side by side in defense of Bible authority and fellowship during the institutional battle now stand divided. Bible authority and fellowship are still the issue, but some have moved from the stand they once took. It is sad to see that some, in the past, would cry out in anger at some of the same things they themselves will preach, teach, or fellowship today. This not only puts their soul in danger, but also they are influencing a great number of people who have confidence in them.

We are already paying a great price among many congregations that once fellowshiped each other’s meetings but are now silently shunning each other. There is a deadly quietness that separates friends and even families concerning the issues. One brother said, “This will be a silent split.” This is exactly what is happening, but the lines are becoming clearer each day. We are paying a great price for generic preaching because the church will lose its identity if it

continues. As I read the advertisements of some churches of Christ, I am amazed at the similarity with the denominational ads. It is difficult to know what they believe anymore, because they don't declare it as they once did. The all-sufficiency and distinctiveness of the church need to be declared.

The old saying, "As the pulpit goes, so goes the church" is very true. It is the preacher's responsibility to "preach the word" as talked about in **Neh. 8:8**: "*So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*" Paul tells Timothy, "*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching*" (**2 Tim. 4:2**). We need a balance of preaching that can be understood by all in the pew. We must get back to distinctive Bible preaching with common sense and lessons learned. When this kind of preaching is being done the people don't have to wonder what has been said or what point was being made.

When folks leave the assembly after hearing a sermon on immodest dress there should not be any doubt in their mind that they should cover their nakedness. Ladies, young and old, should know to cover their legs and chest so the men serving the Lord's table don't have to close their eyes while passing the tray. Instead, many times we hear some preachers trying to find "loop-holes" that will allow folks to dress in the style and fashion that pleases them. And, if they can't find a "loophole," they will water down or apologize for God's principles to the point the sermon is worthless.

When a congregation hears a sermon on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, they should understand that marriage is, as Tom Roberts preached: "One man, one wom-

an, for life, with only one exception." They should understand putting away one's mate for any cause other than fornication is not lawful.

The congregation needs to know what the issues are and how to combat them. The congregation needs to be equipped with knowledge that will allow them to recognize error no matter where it raises its ugly head. And whether we like it or not, the preacher leads the charge.

We need first principle sermons to get people saved and distinctive preaching about how to stay saved. We need to hear sin called sin and direct application made to the pew where the preaching is being done. Some young people have never heard this type preaching, and it has been a long time for many who are older. Our young need to be indoctrinated in the whole council of God, and only distinctive preaching and teaching will get it done.

There are some things that don't seem wrong, in and of themselves, but history has proven they can lead to places a Christian doesn't need to go. This is where we need to apply lessons learned. We need to look where the practice has led others who did the same thing and warn the people not to go there.

There are times the congregation needs good uplifting, encouraging sermons that makes them feel good. And, there are times toes need to be stomped all over and hearts made heavy to help folks stay on the right path. This is where we need to use common sense, knowing the needs of the congregation.

No, it is not as hard to preach about general sin, as it is to point out specific sins of those in the few you are facing. That is

why it is so difficult for some to do distinctive preaching. One older preacher said he thought he might could “let up” as he got elder, but found this was not true.

Yes, the “Great Battle” of the past few decades was very tiresome and some folks have grown weary of pointed sermons, but preachers and elders need to remember that, if souls are to be saved, the gospel

must be preached and preached boldly. And sometimes they have to raise their voice to get the attention of those at ease in Zion.

Bottom line, the “High Cost of Generic Preaching” will be paid with many souls in the pew and the blood will be on the hands of preachers and elders that failed to blow the warning trumpet.

ILLUSTRATIONS

“He did not tell them anything without illustrating it with a story” (Matt. 13:34b, GW)

When tempted to sin, we can be guilty of deceiving ourselves into thinking, “It’s just one sin.” But is one sin ever really “just one sin?”

In Rev. 18:4-5, John records, *“I heard another voice from heaven, saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive any of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her offenses’* (NASB). Sin has a way of “piling up” without us even realizing it. A classic example proving this point is that of David. When David sent for Bathsheba after seeing her bathing on her rooftop, there is a good possibility he did not realize he had already committed the sin of lust before ever proceeding to commit fornication with her (see 2 Sam. 11:2-4). And those who are familiar with the full story of David and Bathsheba are well aware of the lengthy list of sins David committed as result of that unlawful affair. David lusted after Bathsheba (11:3); committed fornication with her (11:4); sought to deceive and cover his sins (11:6-13); orchestrated the death of an innocent man (11:14-24); downplayed the horror of his murderous actions (11:25); and showed no remorse for his actions (11:26-27) until Nathan’s parable led him to repent (12:1-14; see also Psalm 51). See how sin piled up for David?

What about us today? Take a basic example like forsaking the assemblies on Sunday morning to go fishing with our buddies. If we do so, we actually commit much more than just one sin. We forsake the assemblies (Heb. 10:24-25); sin willfully (Heb. 10:26-27); do not put God first (Matt. 6:33); do not spur our brethren to love and good works (Heb. 10:24); neglect encouraging our brethren (Heb. 10:25); do not teach and admonish our brethren in song (Col. 3:16); do not commemorate the death of Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-34); do not contribute our means to ensure the work of the church continues (1 Cor 16:1-2); and we set the wrong example for our buddies (1 Tim. 4:12).

See how even the most “minor” of sins can pile up? Do not believe the Devil’s lie; committing one sin often results in far more than just one sin. (DTS)

The Other Five Elements of the Lord's Supper

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Christians realize there are two elements of the Lord's Supper: the unleavened bread representing the body of Christ and the fruit of the vine representing His shed blood. However, there are also at least five more elements (conditions) to the Lord's Supper that we must consider in order to administer the Lord's Supper in an authorized manner.

(1) PLURALITY OF DISCIPLES

In **Acts 20:7a**, which is our approved example for administering the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week, we read, "*Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread.*" From this verse, we see that "*disciples*" (plural) must partake of the Lord's Supper and not just one single disciple. Only one disciple partaking of the Lord's Supper goes against what this verse teaches.

(2) SPECIFIC PLURALITY: WHOLE CHURCH

Not only must there be a plurality of "*disciples*" partaking of the Lord's Supper, but the specific plurality taught by the Bible is the whole church (**1 Cor. 11:18a**; see also **1 Cor. 14:23a**). It is insufficient for a few Christians to get together for the Lord's Supper; they must be all "*come together as a church*" in order to meet the specific rule of plurality required.

(3) WHOLE CHURCH IN THE SAME PLACE

In addition to the specific rule of plurality needing to be met in order to properly administer the Lord's Supper, the whole church must also be together "*in one place*" (**1 Cor. 11:20a, NKJV**; see also **1 Cor. 14:23a**). So, if a congregation offered the Lord's Supper via Zoom while its members are all in

different places (their homes, presumably), they would violate this rule.

(4) WHOLE CHURCH FULFILLING A UNIFIED PURPOSE

In order for the Lord's Supper to be properly administered to a whole church together in one place, every member must fulfill the same purpose - partaking the Lord's Supper (**1 Cor. 11:33a**). If the church (and remember, it must be the whole church, that is, every member present) has not "*come together to eat*," then there is not a unified purpose. **QUESTION: Is this rule not violated during a second serving of the Lord's Supper?**

(5) WHOLE CHURCH FULFILLING UNIFIED PURPOSE AT THE SAME TIME

The fifth and final element under consideration deals with an often overlooked aspect of the Lord's Supper: time. In **1 Cor. 11:33**, Paul commands, "*Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.*" In order to properly administer the Lord's Supper, everyone must be partaking during the same time period. There cannot be some members of the congregation partaking at one time, then there be another time set aside for other members to partake later. **QUESTION: Is this rule not violated during a second serving of the Lord's Supper?**

CONCLUSION

If we do not meet every condition required by the scriptures but proceed to offer the Lord's Supper, then we do so in a way that God has not authorized. It is the equivalent of using eggs and milk in place of unleavened bread and grape juice since we do not have authority for that either.

Thou Shall Not Get Drunk, But Drink In Moderation

ROWLAND FEMI GBAMIS | ONTARIO, CANADA
PUBLISHED DEC. 2023 IN UNMASKING SOPHISTRY

“But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil;” “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” (Heb. 5:14; Phil.1:9-10-NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

The caption: “Thou Shall Not Get Drunk, But Thou Shall Drink In Moderation” was echoed by a friend-professor while deliberating on the moral laxity of Paul Pelosi’s behaviour while pleading guilty to drunken driving in California on August 23, 2022, following his arrest on May 28 in Napa County, north of San Francisco, after a Driving Under Influence (DUI) test showed he had a blood alcohol content of .082%, just over the legal limit (Steve Gorman, 2022). My friend believes Mr. Pelosi should have respected himself enough by drinking moderately, which would have saved him all the embarrassment. On the contrary, during our discussion, I hold that he ought to have abstained from alcohol as that alone would have saved him all the disgrace he brought upon himself and the revered position his wife is holding in the American political space. In his judgment, the professor believes that I am a reasonable person; hence I should understand it is nowhere written in the Bible categorically: “thou shall not drink.” As I tried to get him to reason his argument, he retorted, “Oh, Rowland, come on! The logical conclu-

sion should tell you that what God wants is drinking in moderation.” Interesting discussion, right? It is not surprising at all! I have heard gospel preachers and elders in the Lord’s church advance the same arguments. Distinctly, in the remaining part of this write-up, I will argue that for children of God to be filled with the Spirit of God, they must make every effort to abstain from every form of alcoholic beverage.

WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

Alcohol is a narcotic drug, even though some do not consider it so because of its legality, but it is. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, alcohol is a liquor drink such as wine, beer, or distilled spirits, encompassing ethyl alcohol or ethanol (CH₃CH₂OH) as an inebriation agent. Alcohol produces a state of stupor. Note, however, that **the word stupor and stupid originated from the same root word. In other words, alcohol is stupidity in a bottle**, and the effects of alcohol on the brain begin with the first drink because it directly affects the brain and impairs the brain’s ability to coordinate appropriately with the body’s motor functions. Alcohol is a Central Nervous System Depressant (CNSD) that slows down the brain’s function and speed. It blurs the critical faculty of discernment in the brain and causes memory lapses.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

While there are several ways to quench the Spirit in the Scripture, one sure way to do that quickly is drinking alcohol. Unsurprisingly, the Holy Spirit says we should

abstain from every form of evil (**1 Thess. 5:22**). To “*abstain*” is to refrain, withdraw, and cease doing something; in this sense, cease/renounce drinking alcoholic beverages. From ancient times, people have been drinking alcoholic beverages ranging from wine to beer and brewed drinks like burukutu, an alcoholic beverage brewed from the grains of Guinea corn and millet. In **Genesis**, we read an account of a man of God who got drunk and became naked in his shelter due to inebriation (**9:20**). While Noah lay naked in his shamefulness, his son, Ham, derided him, and upon discovery by Noah, he accosted his son (**v.21**). Evil begets evil. Noah’s sense of right and wrong became dull through the evil allurements of fermented wine. We all know the end of the story, the lineage of Ham-Canaanites eventually became a sworn enemy to the children of the Israelites—all credit to Noah, the man of God’s undiscerning attitude toward wine (**v.25**). Dear readers, let us pause and reflect on the impact of our influence on many generations to come. As preachers and elders, may God forbid we stand shamefully on the pulpit to encourage alcoholic drinkers, preaching that what God teaches is moderation.

In another breath, we read of another righteous man, Lot, who got trapped by his two daughters and was subjected to the evil influence of alcohol. While many have condemned that he laid with his daughters, I am more concerned that if Lot had refused the first drink, he would have circumvented the evil scheme by his daughters (**Gen. 19:30-35**). Unfortunately, Lot had carnal knowledge of his daughters while sleeping without knowing because he found himself at the lowest point of his senses due to the evil influence of the alcohol. Consequently,

the two products that resulted from the reprehensible behaviour were Moab and Ben-Ammi, two strong enemies to the children of Israelites (**v.36-38**). How sad, right? Unsurprisingly, one of the many problems in the Lord’s church today results from alcoholic drinks. Problem upon problem! Children are born out of wedlock because someone went to a drinking party and engaged in fornication resulting in a “marriage of convenience” to avoid shame. At home, the economic impact of alcohol on family finance is disastrous; in society, the rate of car accidents and crashes leading to bodily harm and deaths saddens the heart. Also, consider how alcohol negatively impacts our health, including diabetes, kidney problems, cardiovascular diseases, and liver cirrhosis. Alcoholic beverages accompany many crimes in society.

The question is, why would a child of God be found romancing such intoxicants and defending such? Sometimes, the alcoholic drinkers know too much about Solomon’s sermon on drunkenness but forget his admonition that says: “*Wine is a mocker; strong drink is raging: whosoever is deceived by it is not wise*” (**Prov. 20:1**); “*Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the winewhen it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things*” (**23:29-33**).

Let us pause and reflect; why would it be difficult for any sincere person to understand the simple instructions and godly

guidance in the above passage? Wine is a mocker. Was Noah not mocked and felt ashamed after he woke up from his drink? How about Lot? His daughters made a caricature of him by weakening his sense of right and wrong through alcoholic drinks. How is that difficult to understand for my dear wine drinkers? The wise man says, *“Whoever is led astray by wine is not wise.”* In other words, you are a fool if you submit to the evil allurements of alcoholic wine to dull your senses of reasoning. However, there is hope. The preacher proffers a solution which should suffice: *“Do not look at the wine when it is red and when it sparkles in the cup.”* To fail to heed the warning is to stray in the destruction path. Those who dissipate their energy to justify their drinking habits by running from Genesis to Revelation seeking defense should ponder the following Bible passages and their usages.

Positive (Unfermented Wine)		Negative (Fermented Wine)	
(1)	Gen. 14:18	(1)	Gen. 9:20-21
(2)	Gen. 40:11	(2)	Gen. 19:30-35
(3)	Amos 9:14	(3)	Lev. 10:8-10
(4)	Zech. 10:7	(4)	Prov. 20:1; 4:17
(5)	Isa. 65:8	(5)	Prov. 23:29-35
(6)	Num. 18:12-13	(6)	Prov. 31:4-5
(7)	Gen. 27:28	(7)	Dan. 1:8
(8)	Deut. 7:13	(8)	Isa. 5:22; 56:12
(9)	Prov. 3:10	(9)	Isa. 28:7, 8
(10)	Matt. 26:26-28	(10)	Hab. 2:5,15
(11)	John 2:1-10	(11)	1 Cor. 5:11
(12)	Deut. 11:14	(12)	Eph. 5:18

From the above tabulation, there are two senses in the usage of the passages. The first column depicts Bible passages describing wine from the grapes' juice that contains no alcohol. In this sense, wine is being spo-

ken of as a blessing and commended. It is associated with altar offerings, sustaining power, an emblem of spiritual blessings, an emblem of Christ's blood, and things which strengthen the body and rejoice the heart. In contrast, the second column deals with Bible passages that condemn the sinful practices of drinking wine. They are associated with intoxication, drunkenness, violence, woe, a false sense of security, profane religion, and poison. Hence, it should not be difficult to understand that the context determines whether a wine is fermented, which could lead to intoxication or unfermented wine with no alcoholic content.

Robert Young made an excellent observation on **Eph. 5:18** concerning alcoholic drinkers who argued that drinking is alright, provided one is not drunk. **Eph. 5:18** reads, *“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”* Young observes that the verb “Do not be drunk” (methusko-3182) implies, “Do not start (begin) to be softened” with wine. W. E. Vine describes this verb as: “to make drunk, an inceptive verb that begins the process of the state expressed in methuo (3184), “to drink to intoxication.” Literally, Paul says, **“Do not even begin the process of becoming drunk or softened by alcohol.”** Conclusively, it makes scriptural sense to abstain from initiating the process of drinking alcoholic beverages. For example, consider the account of **Luke 12:45**: *“But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk”* – observe the progression? That is the only way Christians can remain alert and awake as children of God *“filled with the Spirit.”*

REFLECTION ON 1 PETER 4:3

We read in **1 Pet. 4:2-3**: *“That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.”* Peter uses three phrases concerning drinking liquor: excess of wine, revellings and banquetings. Thus, after careful study of our text, I do not think the Holy Spirit deliberately uses words carelessly in delineating the phrases concerning liquor drinking. Excess of wine (Gk. οἰνοφλυγία, oinophlygiai: wine-drinking, drunkenness) describes those who have drunk so much that they are throwing up. The truth is, everyone knows the description above is wrong and is quick to condemn such behaviour. However, there is a fellow that is guilty of revelling (Gk. κῶμοις, kōmois, revels, orgies). He is the fellow that is half-looped, usually loud and boisterous. Lastly, there is a fellow described as banquetings (Gk. πότοις, potois, drinking, carousing). The English Standard Version (ESV) translates it as “drinking parties.” For example, some believe there is nothing wrong with “social drinking” or “drinking a few.” Hence, they see nothing wrong with serving assorted beers in ceremonies such as naming, marriage parties, or housewarming, nor do they see anything inappropriate with entertaining guests with alcoholic drinks in their homes and offices. Remarkably, in all three categories of alcoholic drinking, Apostle Peter says it is part of doing the will of the Gentiles. As children of God, we should want no part of the sinful lifestyles enumerated in our text. Our desire should be to spend our time doing God’s will.

CONCLUSION

Given the above scriptural facts, I believe many here, including my revered professor and friend, would agree that the Bible recognizes the difference between different drinking levels. Moreover, God condemns all three categorizations of drinking as part of the old life of sin! Christians should seek to *“make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof”* (**Rom. 13:14**). It certainly takes great caution to avoid the greater or lesser state of effect from intoxicating drink. Those who genuinely love Christ realize he died in the flesh to destroy sin’s rule over us. Christ’s love should cause us to cease sin (**1 Pet. 4:1**). Let me also appeal to as many who are reading this today to open your hearts by accepting the word of the Lord that says, *“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, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying”* (**Rom. 13:12-13**). Suppose you are one of those who have wasted enough of your life serving the flesh. In that case, you must devote the remainder of your life to doing the Lord’s will in faithful obedience to his word. The Bible says faith comes by hearing (**Rom. 10:17; John 20:30-31**); belief that Jesus is the Son of God (**John 8:24; John 3:18; Acts 8:36-38**); repent of sins (**Luke 13:5; Acts 17:30; Romans 3:23; 6:23**); be baptized in water for the remission of sins (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:21**); and faithfully continue to trust and walk with God (**Matt. 24:13; Heb. 10:36-39; Rev. 2:10; 2 Pet. 2:20-22**). As a child of God struggling with the evil influence of alcohol in your life, let us learn a lesson from King Lemuel’s mother to his son: *“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes, strong*

drink: Lest they drink, forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted” (Prov. 31: 4-5). As God’s children, we should realize that one of the things that destroy kings is alcoholic drinks. See the progression? Is it not true that we are priests in the kingdom of Christ (cf. Rev. 1:6)? Let our lives reflect the glory of God in all ramifications, illuminating this world of darkness. May God help us.

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MYTH BUSTERS

**“They will turn away their ears from the truth & will turn aside to myths”
(2 Tim. 4:4, NASB)**

Deut. 28:43-44 routinely gets shared across social media supporting an American political agenda regarding immigration. Usually, a screenshot of the verses is shared with a caption saying such as, “The Bible Said It All.” Deut. 28:43-44 reads, *“The foreigners living among you will become stronger and stronger, while you become weaker and weaker. They will lend money to you, but you will not lend to them. They will be the head, and you will be the tail”* (NLT). When Americans share this passage, they think they are making an astute quip about immigrants. Yet, if we want to make a genuine application of these verses to our lives today, we would realize we are only admitting we are not obedient to God and deserve this punishment: *“But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you . . . The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail”* (Deut. 28:15, 43-44, NKJV). See the consequences of cherry picking verses out of context just so we can find “support” for something we want to believe? (DTS)

Faith is Reasonable and Rational

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Simply believing something does not make it true. Faith involves more than just wanting to believe something is true regardless of the evidence to the contrary. Yet, this is where many people stand in religious matters. Some take a non-intellectual approach to Bible faith. They ignore all reason. They are ruled solely by emotions. Their faith is based on whatever feels good to them at the moment. However, it must be realized that God gave us a mind, with the ability to think and reason, and He expects us to use it. We must use our minds the way God intended and not “leave our brain at the door” as a good preacher friend of mine one time wrote concerning this same matter. There are others who would depend completely on rationality. They rely solely on human reasoning. Though we must use our minds to reason things out, it is important that we don’t rely too much on rationality or else we might end up rejecting things in the Scriptures because they don’t “make sense” to us - *“There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12); “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23)*. There must be a balance. While our minds are to dwell on God’s word, as we think and reason from the Bible, we must however allow the Bible to have the final say and not what we think.

Faith is grounded in truth and truth is rational. God’s word is truth (**John 17:17**). God’s word, the gospel, is reasonable and not a bunch of myths and fables (**2 Pet. 1:16**). It is always true no matter whether you or I believe it or accept it. Truth is also objec-

tive. If not, there is no difference whatsoever between truth and error or right and wrong. God’s word is true and there is no middle ground. Faith does not require a complete understanding of everything. Though we are to believe in God, we do not know everything there is about God: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord” (Isa. 55:8)*. There are many things beyond our comprehension about God but we are still to put our trust in Him. Neither does faith require us to understand why God has done what He has done nor why He requires certain things of us. In **Gen. 12**, Abraham by faith obeyed God even when he did not know where he was going. His faith did not require him to know everything. People, today, do not obey the gospel because, in their own mind, they don’t understand everything about the gospel. I doubt many of us understand everything about our car’s engine but that doesn’t keep us from driving, does it?

God has given us enough reason to obey without questioning His reasons. When anyone refuses to be baptized because he doesn’t understand why God chose baptism, then he is not demonstrating faith.

SWORD SWIPES

**“Shun profane and vain babblings”
(2 Tim. 2:16a, KJV)**

Fools can still show wisdom.

**“Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise” (Prov. 17:28a, ESV).
(DTS)**

Biblical Genealogies - Why They Matter

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It is not uncommon when studying the Bible to gloss over genealogies. A begat B, B begat C, C begat D, and so on. On the surface, these long lists of names do not seem to serve a purpose. However, such a mentality was not the case at all in the early church. Believers focused upon genealogies so much that Paul had to warn Christians twice not to “give heed to . . . endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith” (1 Tim. 1:4; see also Titus 3:9). In the modern church, however, many if not most believers reading Scripture are prone to skip over genealogies, as they seem to have little practical relevance to Christian living. I have certainly been guilty of this, thinking there is no reason to read through an overly exhaustive list of names. That is, until one day while brushing up on the book of Exodus, I was reminded what was said of Moses and Aaron in Exodus 6.

After listing the families of Moses and Aaron, it is recorded, “*These are the same Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, ‘Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies.’ These are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt. These are the same Moses and Aaron*” (v.26-27). One of the most interesting lessons to be learned from this passage is that God has always used imperfect people to perform His will. Moses was well aware of his shortcomings. In fact, Moses was so aware of his imperfections that he repeatedly tried rejecting God’s call at the burning bush to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage (see Exod. 3:11; 4:1; 4:10; 4:13). However, God does not

call perfect people to do His bidding. Remember, Christ “*died for the ungodly*” (Rom. 5:6); He died to bring “*sinners*” to Him (Rom. 5:8). God calls imperfect people to come out of their imperfections to do His will (see Rom. 6:1-4). After all, the “*same Moses and Aaron*” who were imperfect, sinful beings were the “*same Moses and Aaron*” who led God’s children out of bondage and performed many great works in His name.

By looking at certain genealogies, you can find some of the most significant sinners used for positive purposes. Consider Rahab the harlot, or prostitute, which was an extreme offense under the Law of Moses (Deut. 22:21). The Lord knew that Rahab was capable of more than what her sinfulness appeared to the human eye and, therefore, used her to defeat the pagan Jericho and is included in the lineage of Jesus. Other mentionable sinners included in the lineage of Christ are David and Solomon, who made unbelievably positive impacts, yet certainly were not impervious to sin. And do not think that other great people recorded in the Bible were not once sinners; their sins simply were not specifically described in scripture. It is a well-known fact that every human being who possesses the ability to distinguish good from evil has sinned and fights against countless temptations to sin daily (see Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). Yet, everyone can be used in fulfilling God’s divine purpose in bringing others to Him.

Through family lineage, God exemplifies how He uses everyone, imperfect as we may be, to fulfill His purpose. The impact on society and shaping of future prominent

individuals is the reason we see the names of controversial (both positive and negative) people mentioned in every list. The same can apply to our own families. There's an old hymn we sing that goes like this: "Faith of our Fathers! Holy Faith! We will be true to thee till death" (Frederick William Faber, 1849). The clear implication of the line is that if we have family members, older brothers and sisters in Christ, etc. who devoutly follow/followed God, we should follow their examples of faith. The Hebrew writer urges, "*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith*" (**Heb. 13:7, ESV**). However, we must also keep in mind that if our "fathers" or "leaders" walked in disobedience, then we must never "be true" to their examples of unfaithfulness.

The Hebrew writer, regarding the Israelites who knew of God's promises of salvation yet walked in disobedience causing them to miss out on that reward, warns, "*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience*" (**Heb. 4:11**). If we walk in the faith (or lack thereof) of our fathers who missed the mark that God requires, then we condemn ourselves to the same judgment they will face. An example of this is found with the second generation of Israelites after the exodus from Egypt. God, through Moses, warned His people, "*And look! You have risen in your fathers' place, a brood of sinful men, to increase still more the fierce anger of the Lord against Israel. For if you turn away from following Him, He will once again leave them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people*" (**Num. 32:14-15**). Certainly, we must not repeat the same mistakes of those who walked in disobedience. No, instead, we should remember what the Lord once spoke through Zechariah to His erring

people: "*Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds'*" (**Zech. 1:3-4, ESV**).

When we look at genealogies, each story and each generation points to how God can work through His people if we allow His righteousness to shine through us. Every name in a genealogy shows a generation where God's plan and purpose are put forth in the world. The mere existence of so many lists of families with ties to high priests, frequent traces to David, Abraham, and Noah, and networks of relationships outlined in the Bible are a testament of God's work. These lineages demonstrate the detailed nature of God and His interest in the people of His creation. God does not view the highest order of His creation as some vague and nameless group of people. He knows each by name, with specificity and precision for their purpose (see **Jer. 1:5; Nah. 1:7; 2 Tim. 2:19**). Since Adam and Eve, every single generation is a representation of God's grace at work in the lives of His people. Though family lists may not seem as exciting as other parts of the Bible, each name and list represents important information that has significance in much of the history of mankind.

CONCLUSION

Genealogies show how even though there will always be broken and tested generations, legacies prevail. Your ancestry may not be fully known, but know that just like some of the generations we read about throughout the Bible, you too can create a meaningful future for next generations based on the legacy you leave behind based on your service to God.

WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY BE?

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

“And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks” (Hebrews 11:4, ESV).

Was the Death of Stephen Unnecessary?

WINDELL WISER

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The title that heads this article may sound strange, but the actions and philosophies of some merit consideration of such a question. It's true we live in a country where we enjoy religious freedom. It is not against the law to preach Christ in our country; whereas, it was against the law of the Jews for Stephen to preach Christ. There is a vast difference between the attitude of the officials in government in Stephen's day and the attitude of the officials in government in our day. Sometimes I wonder if there isn't just as much a difference in the attitude of Stephen and the attitude of most preachers today. I don't mean denominational preachers but those who claim to be gospel preachers.

How many “gospel preachers” do you know that would use the plain language that Stephen used in his preaching? Stephen said, *“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”* (Acts 7:51-53). Every person who claims to be a gospel preacher needs to examine those words very carefully. We need to ask ourself the question: Would we preach like Stephen did? Would we say what the said or would we water it down and soften it up? Would we

reason that it would not be using good judgment to preach the way Stephen preached? If Stephen had used some of this good judgment that we are inclined to think about, he might not have been stoned to death. Couldn't Stephen have used a little more of what we call diplomacy and possibly saved himself from being stoned to death? Sometimes I wonder if what we are doing, when we talk about good judgment and diplomacy, is excusing ourselves for compromising the truth. Don't misunderstand me. I am not recommending that we do not use good judgment, but could you image Stephen, Paul or Jesus keeping quiet when matters of truth are at stake? Would they excuse themselves from speaking out against unscriptural practices under the pretense of using good judgment or diplomacy? Preachers who never say anything against church support of human institutions, church sponsored recreation, church sponsored ball teams, and kindergartens should certainly ask themselves these questions. Also, the same holds true for preachers who are afraid to say anything about worldly practices, immodest apparel, and etc.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Since all Christians are expected to teach God's Word (see Acts 8:4; Heb. 5:12; Matt. 28:19-20), brother Wisser's point not only applies to preachers, but also applies to every individual Christian (see Jude 3).

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**“BUT WHEN THEY BELIEVED PHILIP AS HE PREACHED GOOD NEWS
ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST,
THEY WERE BAPTIZED, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN.”**

ACTS 8:12, ESV

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