

# LENEXA EDIFIER

**“and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32)**

**November 27, 2022**

## TO WHAT END

Some years ago, as Tracy and I were about to celebrate our twentieth wedding anniversary, I asked Tracy what she wanted to do and she responded that she would like to go on a cruise. So, given that we were going to have to drive to Alabama so that our girls could spend a week at their grandparent’s house, we found a cruise ship sailing out of Mobile and spent the most of a week sailing to Mexico and back. It was a nice, relaxing break and I enjoyed it. That’s not to say that another cruise is now at the top of my “vacation I’d most like to take” list. But I’d probably go again, if for no other reason than the wealth of ideas for articles, illustrations and Wednesday night talks. For instance...

After we had been “at sea” for a few hours and had departed Mobile Bay, the cruise director came over the intercom and announced that we were now sailing in international waters and that the “duty-free” shops were officially open. There were watches and jewelry and gold and diamonds for sale, along with the typical “souvenir” type merchandise that you might expect from any vacation experience. But the product that seemed to get the most hype was alcohol. You name it, and you could buy it on the ship, tax free. In fact, there was an entire wing of the shopping area dedicated solely to liquor. This being my first experience with cruising, I suppose that I really hadn’t thought much about this, but I quickly realized that one of the consistent attractions of our five days at sea and in Mexico was the consumption of booze. There was a “tasting event” the first night where anyone of legal drinking age could sample everything from rum to vodka to scotch to cognac. In the casual restaurant, wine stewards were circulating through the room offering samples of wine to accompany the evening’s formal dinner. At every show, waiters and waitresses were constantly hawking something from the bar. One night there was a martini tasting event; another night featured “cigars and mojitos”. Free champagne at the art auction; free tequila samples in Progresso; a “drink of the day” and “wine of the day” listed in the daily calendar of events. And of course, don’t forget the beer. I didn’t count the number

of bars on the ship, but needless to say they were plentiful.

I suppose that I shouldn’t have been surprised by the prevalence of alcohol on our cruise, given the prevalence of alcohol consumption in society generally. But somehow, in that environment, there was simply more emphasis upon the use of such. I guess that’s why Carnival calls their fleet “The Fun Ships.” And given the commonplace use of alcohol in our day, it is not surprising that the issue of social drinking among Christians is faced by each generation. I am hearing more and more about disciples of Jesus who regularly drink alcohol. And I must admit that such a practice raises some serious concerns.

I have heard and read all kinds of sermons and articles discussing the issue of Christianity and alcohol. Some of them are honest, forthright portrayals of biblical teaching. Others engage in convoluted semantic gymnastics in attempts to legislate where the Bible doesn’t. The simple reality is that the Word of God nowhere says that it is a sin to take a drink of alcohol. I’ll probably be castigated somewhat for such a statement, but it is nonetheless true. However, I don’t believe that the absence of such a statement means that Christians should use alcohol for other than medicinal purposes. It seems clear that Christians in the biblical record drank fermented beverages. And while they were not nearly so potent as most of the offerings of the present day, a person could become inebriated if he drank enough. Such drunkenness is clearly condemned (**1 Pet.4.3f; 1 Cor.6.9-10; Gal.5.19-21**). In fact, Peter’s admonition in **1 Pet.4.3** makes a pretty strong argument against the practice of social drinking, and the general thrust of God’s Word does not cast alcohol in a favorable light at all. Consider the warning of **Prov.23.29f**, the description of wine as *“a mocker”* (**Prov.20.1**), or the frequency of immorality, violence, injustice, and sin with which wine is associated throughout the bible. You would think that a wise person – one who really wants to serve the Lord and avoid anything that might impede his judgment – wouldn’t really need a command to tell us to avoid alcohol. But there are some who persist in the insistence that Christians can engage in the casual use

of alcohol. May I suggest that we approach this question from another angle?

Why drink? To what end? What is the real purpose of using alcohol for those of us who are trying to serve God? Does it help me to become more godly? Is the use of such productive of some greater level of maturity? Is it an asset to my influence? Does it enhance my character? Or do Christians use alcohol because we are driven by social acceptability? Or have we used it enough that we need its effect (I believe that's called addiction)? Do we like the sensation, the physical stimulation, the buzz, even the taste? And do any of these realities justify the use of such? Couldn't we make the same arguments about other drugs? It's very rare to hear anything good that comes from the use of alcohol, and very common to hear about difficulty, tragedy, heartache, and disappointment. How many physical injuries are alcohol related? How many sexual improprieties, from consensual intercourse to rape, result from drinking? How many deaths can be attributed to the impact of alcohol? Why, pray tell, would we want to involve ourselves with something that consistently produces problems? My strong suspicion is that those who advocate its use are more driven by worldly concerns than they are by godly concerns. Bottom line? We want to drink because we don't want to be different. Or because we like it and don't want to quit it.

Maybe, just maybe, we are asking the wrong question. Instead of asking, "Can a Christian drink alcohol?", perhaps we ought to ask, "Should a Christian drink alcohol?" Paul noted on more than one occasion that what is lawful is not necessarily helpful (1 Cor.6.12f; 10.23f). I know that's not the principle that most folks want to consider, but it seems to me that it may be the wisest. It's a real test of maturity when we start thinking more about what we ought to do than about what we have the right to do. "To what end?" is a sobering question. Or at least it ought to be.

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## The Work of the New Testament Church

Surveying the religious landscape you will find churches sponsoring ball teams, building gymnasiums and bowling alleys, offering day care, diet and exercise programs and musical and dramatic performances, and engaged in political activism. In contrast, when you read the New Testament you discover that the work of the church was spiritual in nature.

Jesus said, *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (John 18:36). Paul wrote that *"the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 14:17). The universal church (i.e., the body of all saved people) has no earthly organization. Thus, any discussion of the work of the church would only concern the local church (congregation).

The work of local churches is found in the New Testament and is very simple in nature.

### Preaching the Gospel - The Work of Evangelism

The church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas away to preach the gospel (Acts 13:2-3). When they returned, they gathered the church and *"reported all that God had done with them, and that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles"* (Acts 14:27). The new congregation at Thessalonica was commended by Paul because *"from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth"* (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The church at Philippi had *"fellowship in the gospel"* with Paul (Philippians 1:5) and *"sent once and again for my necessities"* (Philippians 4:15-16). Indeed, the church is the *"pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Timothy 3:15). Evangelism is the very life's blood of the local church.

### Edification - The Work of Growth

Paul wrote that God had provided everything necessary for the *"equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:12). Christians must be taught the word of God so that they may *"grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ."* Each member of the body is then to contribute his strength for the *"growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love"* (Ephesians 4:15-16). To that end, local churches should plan occasions for the gospel to be preached, Bible classes, training sessions, and suitable worship periods so that every local member may be challenged to reach his/her full potential as mature and knowledgeable disciples.

### Benevolence - The Work of Relief

Early in the history of the church at Jerusalem there was an occasion when some of the believers experienced need. On a voluntary basis, that need was met as some Christians even sold property to provide assistance (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37). Later there were a great number of widows in need, and the church appointed special servants to administer this service (Acts 6:1-7). No outside organizations were needed. The church did not seek government assistance. The church simply took care of its own. Later there was a case of greater need than the local church could meet (because of a famine), and congregations as far away

as Greece sent messengers with their help. Read **1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9; Romans 15:26-27**. Family members were first to provide for their own (**1 Timothy 5:8**). *“If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those that are really widows” (1 Timothy 5:16).*

What a contrast this is to the frantic promotion of the social gospel activities found among the many churches today. Let the church be the church. Let it do the divine work for which it was appointed.

*by Frank Himmel Taken from The Beacon Electronic Edition.*

## THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

*“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4 NASB).* The work of Old Testament prophets could not have been easy. False prophets are scattered throughout the Old Testament (**Ezekiel 13:9**). But true, faithful prophets were easily identified as such when their messages unfolded and proved to be true (**Jeremiah 28:9**). Calling people to repentance is never easy; reactions are varied and are sometimes violent toward the messenger. When the prophet’s heart burned like a fire, he had something to say. Still, he might find himself in a well (**Jeremiah 20:9**).

Rather than warnings about sin and rebellion, Habakkuk’s oracle questions the actions and motives of God. *“How long, O LORD, will I call for help?” (Habakkuk 1:1).* How long would Jehovah wait before punishing the wicked? Can a righteous God fail to punish sin (**Habakkuk 1:13**)? Of course, God was doing something. He challenged the prophet to stop and look and see the rise of the Chaldeans, who became instruments in God’s hands for His righteous purposes. God would use these pagan idolaters for His own purposes; the Most High rules in the kingdoms of men (**Daniel 4**). If the kingdoms of men refused to repent, they, too, suffered destruction.

How should Habakkuk respond? How shall we respond to God’s reign over His universe? Will our faith shine through; or will our arrogance and recalcitrance be on display? The importance of faith is clear in the New Testament. Three passages pick up on Habakkuk’s recognition of the need for faith. **Romans 1:17:** *“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.” Galatians 3:11:* *“Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is*

*evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.” Hebrews 10:38: “But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”*

The righteous shall live by faith; the righteous are justified by faith. The good news of the gospel says that Jesus died for us; we can be righteous, acquitted of the guilt of sin and stand justified in God’s sight. Do we mistakenly believe that self-righteousness is sufficient to save? Are we so good that we keep God’s law perfectly? If yes, then we do not need Jesus. If, no, then we need to have faith in Jesus; we trust Him to do what He says He will do, namely, save us as we walk by faith, hand in hand, with Him. Christians in the book of Hebrews were having problems with their faith. Persecutions, trials, and spiritual weariness wore them down. Their faith was weak; they were in danger. They needed faith; they, and we, too, need grace. “The false dichotomy of ‘Old Testament = Law; New Testament = Grace’ is seen in reality to be illusory” (*Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, David W. Baker, Tyndale, 61). Paul preached the gospel to thousands; the gospel was preached to Abraham.

What does a life without faith look like? Pride, arrogance, deceit, rebellion, blasphemy, and mistreatment of others paint a sordid picture. The foundation of our lives must be strong, vibrant faith. Without faith, the foundation crumbles. We better listen for the Babylonians. They are on the move.

**Randy Harshbarger**

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*and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:32)*

*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*

Psa. 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.

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**1,2,3 JOHN** - BILL MILLER  
WEDNESDAY EVENING BIBLE CLASS:  
**EXODUS TO SINAI** - JIM STAUFFER  
SUNDAY SERMON: **THE LOCAL BODY OF CHRIST**

What Must I Do To Be Saved?  
**Hear the gospel** - Romans 10:17  
**Believe** in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6  
**Repent** of sins - Acts 17:30  
**Confess** Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10  
**Be Baptized** for remission of sins - Acts 2:38  
**Be Faithful** unto death - Revelation 2:10