

A Review of Some Sermons and Bible Classes

Dub McClish

Introduction

Some time ago a friend and brother in Christ sent me the recordings of a Gospel meeting series he had recently attended, asking me to comment on their content. Since these lessons were delivered publicly, I feel at liberty to fulfill my friend's request. The preacher in this series was the late Jimmy Allen (1930–2020). He was a Bible professor at Harding University for half a century but was perhaps best known for the fifty city-wide evangelistic campaigns in which he preached during the 1960s and 70s.

The Gospel Meeting Sermons

The recordings revealed that Allen preached some powerful sermons on “first principles” (particularly on Acts 16 and the conversion of the jailor), which I could wish that the entire world could hear. One very noticeable thing, however, was the abundance of references he made to his evangelistic campaign appearances, including the mention of the hundreds (sometimes thousands) who were in attendance and the number of responses to the invitation. I could not help thinking of Solomon's caution to all of us: “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; A stranger, and not thine own lips” (Pro. 27:2).

I further questioned the relevance of his repeated praise and endorsement of his old college classmate, Jerry Jones. He was chairman of Harding's Bible Department in the 1980s when he was fired because of his defense of the Crossroads/Boston Movement (which eventually imploded, the remnants of which became “The International Church of Christ”). Jones thereafter moved to Boston and joined the cult, but his enchantment with its leadership was short-lived. He thereafter began conducting “discipling seminars,” apparently for about anyone who invites him (including liberal congregations and denominational groups).

The Class on Romans

During the Gospel meeting, Allen taught daytime classes on Romans, and with some of his class material I must take serious exception.

Assertions About the Holy Spirit

One such issue was his advocacy that the Holy Spirit directly “enhances,” “hones,” and “sharpens” our natural abilities so that we are “more gifted” and can therefore do some things we might not be able to do otherwise (to his credit, he disclaims any present miraculous manifestation of the Spirit).

Strangely, he did not cite even one Scripture for his assertion that the Spirit aids us directly. His “proof,” at least on this occasion, was, “I am convinced of that” – about the same level of evidence the Mormon “elders” use to “verify” the inspiration of the Book of Mormon. If the Spirit so helps me, how will I be judged at last? Will I give a final account to the Lord of the deeds I have done in the body or of the deeds the Spirit – helping me directly – **and** I have done (2 Cor. 5:10)? And if I arrive at the Judgment unfaithful to the Lord, will not the Holy Spirit have to share in the blame?

The question is not, as he asked, “Do you suppose the Lord **could...**” do this or that, but rather, “What does the New Testament teach about what the Lord does and how He does it?” I was made to wonder how far he might go with the suggestion that the Spirit “enhances” one’s natural abilities. Suppose one’s “natural gift” is adeptness at interpreting the Scriptures. Does the Spirit “enhance” that gift to make him a better interpreter than a brother or sister who is not so naturally gifted? What is the practical difference in this claim and the “enlightenment” claims of Calvinists? What is the difference in this claim and inspiration? Despite his disclaimers relating to miraculous activity, I am unable to see how there can be a direct impact of the Holy Spirit upon a human being without some sort of miraculous activity being involved.

I reject the claim that the Spirit does things **to** the Christian **directly** and **immediately** (i.e., apart from what He does **for** us through His Word and through providence [Rom. 8:16, 26]). I do so on the ground that the Scriptures do not so teach. We cannot have a better ground for said rejection.

Assertions About Drinking Wine

Brother Allen indicated he had a drinking problem in his youth, but gave it up to be a “teetotaler,” for which he is to be commended. However, I have heard no plainer blatant justification of “social drinking” (disclaiming all the while any encouragement of it) than he offered. On Romans 14:21, discussing the “strong” and the “weak,” he asserted that *wine* in this verse refers to fermented, alcoholic wine. He then concluded that those who are “strong” can drink “a small amount” of wine with an evening meal without sinning. He asked that, if we count such drinking habits as sinful, then what shall we do about brethren in Argentina, Italy, and Russia who drink wine with their meals? Please consider the following:

1. Even if he does not himself drink, his “sinless-social-drinking” **contention** could easily encourage others to drink who do not have such strength of will.
2. In contending that one does not sin in drinking wine with a meal, he assumes the very thing he needs to prove, namely that the “wine” in Romans 14:21 is more than mere grape juice. (Surely, most who read these words understand that the Greek word *oinos* [*wine*] is used in the New Testament of fresh juice as well as fermented juice.) One can as consistently argue

that *flesh* in this passage must refer to strangled animals as to argue that *wine* must refer to fermented grape juice. Paul's principle would be just as forceful if we assume that he did **not** mean fermented wine, and therefore nothing in Romans 14:21 demands that *wine* means an alcoholic beverage.

3. His reference to brethren in other lands who drink alcoholic wine as justification for the practice is amazing. A few years ago, my late wife and I visited Great Britain. One morning at breakfast in Wales, a British couple highly recommended the "black pudding" on the menu. We decided not to try it and were glad that we did; we learned later it was made with blood. Suppose we converted that couple who have eaten blood pudding all their lives, as have most of their fellow-citizens. Should we leave them in the practice and begin teaching that it is not a sin to eat a little blood pudding for breakfast, since our brethren in England, Wales, Germany, and other places do so? This is about the lamest excuse for any practice I can imagine. Rather, we should teach them that the Bible forbids the eating of blood. If we are really going to be concerned about our brethren in Argentina, Italy, and Russia, we will teach them to be teetotalers.
4. Brother Allen's position supports and encourages one of the most evil, destructive, and predatory industries the devil ever invented. It exists for one reason alone – to reap maximum profits at the expense of incalculable human misery in both time and eternity.
5. He gave great encouragement to weak saints (yes, the **real** "weak" folk) who have been wanting justification for their "social drinking" hankerings.
6. To say that one can drink a "small amount of wine" with one's evening meal without sinning is more than just a bit subjective. Who determines what is a "small amount"? An 8-ounce bottle is a "small amount" compared to a barrel.
7. Why just the evening meal? How about breakfast, coffee break, lunch, and "happy hour"?
8. His permissive views on drinking will be anything but helpful to parents who are doing their best to teach their children that drinking alcoholic beverages is sinful, destructive to both soul and body. I shudder to think of the influence of this teaching on the hundreds of students who have sat under him as he taught his college classes on Romans.

Again, nothing in Romans 14:21 encourages anyone to drink any sort of alcoholic beverage. Allen ought to have been ashamed for teaching otherwise.

Concluding Observations

Over the years I have observed more than one case of the following phenomenon: A Gospel preacher who faithfully proclaimed the Word for decades then "mellowed out" in his late years, adopting compromising or outright false positions. Many believe this occurred with Alexander Campbell, a veritable firebrand with the Gospel for several years of his preaching life, but who made serious compromises in his dotage, seen in such things as his infamous

“Lunenburg Letter” and his endorsement of the American Christian Missionary Society. This observation of the behavior of others may explain one or both of the following occurrences:

1. Brother Allen authored 13 books, among them, one titled, *Rebaptism?* (Howard Pub. Co., 1991), which advocated the doctrine that alien sinners need not know the Scriptural purpose of baptism for the act to fulfill that purpose. If he even held this view, much less taught it, in his decades of preaching prior to the book’s publication, it had never come to my attention or to that of the scores of preaching brethren of my close acquaintance. As one of several symptoms of Rubel Shelly’s exodus from the church in the mid-1980s, he revived this doctrine (originally championed by David Lipscomb in the nineteenth century [click [HERE](#) for a concise refutation of this error, “Shall We Surrender the Scriptural Purpose of Baptism?”]). That brother Allen would allow (invite?) the apostate Rubel Shelly to commend his book casts a shadow on both the book and its author, besides the erroneous thesis of his book.
2. Perhaps his best-selling book was *What Is Hell Like? and Other Sermons* (Christian Pub. Co., 1965). The featured sermon in this book is likely his best-remembered one – in which he graphically sets forth the Scriptural reality of eternal punishment for those who “...know not God... and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 The. 1:7-9). He likely preached this sermon 100s of times in the 1,400 or so Gospel meetings in which he preached, besides making it available to readers of his sermon book. Yet, in his late years he confided to a Hell-denying preacher acquaintance that “he was rethinking and restudying the traditional understanding of hell” (i.e., that which he boldly and correctly declared in “What Is Hell Like?”). Allen’s confidant indicated that Jimmy said more to him on the subject, which he was not at liberty to repeat (documented [HERE](#), see p.2, item 4). (For my MS refuting this doctrinal perversion, “Annihilation – a Spiritually Fatal Innovation,” click [HERE](#).) How great an irony (and tragedy), if brother Allen indeed embraced the annihilation heresy on the eve of stepping out into eternity!

Perhaps an appropriate conclusion to my comments is a statement by Jimmy Allen from his autobiography, *Fire in My Bones* (privately pub., 2004, p. 244): “I am too liberal for churches where I used to preach, and I am too conservative for some of the others.”

[**Note:** I wrote this article for, and it originally appeared in the March 2002 issue of *The Gospel Journal*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time. I afterward made a few additional updates]

Attribution: From *thescripturecache.com*; Dub McClish, owner and administrator.