

Reformation
& Revival



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 2, Number 4 • Fall 1993

Some may wonder, “Who is this who writes on the prophecy of Jeremiah and seeks to focus attention on the peculiar subject of spiritual drunkenness?”

For reasons that I cannot explain, I became concerned about revival when I was a boy of about twelve. I determined then to read everything I could find on the subject. I have been pursuing that commitment ever since. However, as the years passed, I gradually realized that my interest in revival had moved from my heart to my head. There was a certain sense in which I was almost a walking encyclopedia on the subject, but had someone invited me to a serious prayer meeting for revival, I would probably have made some excuse for not attending. Then, by the grace of God, after some years of treating revival academically, God brought me to a point of real smashing in my own experience—a deep, deep breaking—and what had risen to my head went back to my heart. I now write, not so much of what I have learned academically, but rather out of my heart and, I believe, out of the heart of God also.

The Proposition

Before looking at Jeremiah thirteen, let me set before you the proposition: *When God is angry with His people because of their unforsaken sin, He may force them into a state of spiritual drunkenness.* Is this a doctrine with which you are familiar? You may consider what I am about to say something of a novelty. It is strange truth, isn't it? In my travels as an itinerant preacher, the most common objection offered to what I say is, “We never heard that before.” In the event that your mind operates that way, let me recommend to you a sermon on this theme by a father of this nation, Thomas Shepard, titled, “Wine for Gospel Wantons,” preached in Boston in 1645. I will not write anything in this article that will be out of harmony with what Shepard and other founders of this nation believed, taught, preached,

and practiced.

But again, before looking at Jeremiah, let me emphasize the righteous judgments of God. Tragically, we have forgotten some important things that our fathers knew well. Strangely, when we use the term judgment we usually think of something in the future, but it was not so earlier. One of the most magnificent reservoirs of great American theology is found in the Sprague Collection in the Widener Memorial Library at Harvard University. William B. Sprague, its collector, pastored for many years in Albany, New York. He gathered a vast array of American sermon material in pamphlet form. In his collection are hundreds of fast day and solemn assembly sermons. Over a long period of American history there was at least one officially called day of fasting and prayer every year. The Thomas Shepard sermon was one of these fast day sermons. This early literature abounds in the understanding that when God is grieved with His people, He brings them into immediate judgment.

The way some people today think, you might suppose God is handicapped and unable to intervene momentarily in the affairs of men and must await some final day when He makes all things right in bringing His people to judgment. But the proposition makes it clear that *when God is angry with His people because of their unrepentant sin, He may bring them into a forced state of spiritual drunkenness immediately*. Clearly, we need to learn to distinguish between those eschatological judgments which are still out in front of us and the righteous judgments of God that happen on a day-to-day basis.

Divine contemporary judgments are of two types: final judgments and remedial judgments. There are many illustrations of each in Scripture—the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira are powerful examples of a final judgment. The term final is used in connection with a judgment in which God brings sudden death upon a person or a people without

giving them any further opportunity for repentance. Peter made no appeal to Ananias or Sapphira and offered them no opportunity for repentance. He leveled the charge against them and the judgment fell suddenly as a bolt from heaven. Scriptural occurrences of this type of judgment are numerous—including such events as the earth opening up and swallowing many, and times when the Lord let one of His enemies destroy tens of thousands of His own people in a single day.

But in His gracious mercy, God often introduces remedial judgments or gracious, corrective judgments, judgments where there are room and opportunity and incentive for repentance. Joel 1:1-2:27 records a remedial judgment in the form of a dreadful plague of locusts that came upon Israel in four great waves and which was accompanied by an awful drought. A solemn assembly was called, and a deep and blessed time of corporate repentance and renewal resulted. Psalm 80 describes an extensive remedial judgment in which God withheld His blessing because He was provoked with His people's prayers, giving them tears to drink in great measure, breaking down the hedge of protection which had been about them, letting them become the laughingstock of their neighbors, even turning His face from them. The remedial effect of the judgment is seen in the broken-hearted lament of the Psalmist which focuses on the words, "Restore us, O God; make Your face shine upon us, that we may be saved" (80:3).

My proposition declares that forced spiritual drunkenness at the hand of God is a remedial judgment. In facing this truth we need to clarify in our minds how God operates. God is holy, and it is beyond His ability to look with favor upon sin. The Scriptures make it plain that when we sin we are to judge ourselves immediately and put that sin away. If we do not judge ourselves, God will judge us. We have a powerful illustration of this in the life of David, who obvious-

ly did not repent of His sin with Bathsheba and his arrangement of the murder of her husband in a timely way. The evidence shows that David lived in those sins, unrepentant, for not less than nine months. Does that mean he went scot-free for that long period of time? No! David was under divine judgment from the moment he first sinned and did not judge himself. In Psalm 32 he speaks of his body wasting away and of his vitality being drained away as with the fever heat of summer. He speaks of his groanings all the day long and of the heavy hand of God upon him. In Psalm 38 he says that God's arrows have sunk deep into him, that there is no soundness in his flesh and no health in his bones because of his sin. He acknowledges that he is benumbed and badly crushed and groans because of the agitation of his heart. Even the light, he acknowledges, has gone from his eyes. In Psalm 51 he pleads that God may wash him thoroughly from his iniquity which is ever before him, that God will enable him again to hear joy and gladness, that the Lord will let the bones which He has broken rejoice, and that all of his iniquities will be blotted out. He was living in a very parched, desert-like experience because he did not deal quickly with his own sins.

God always judges sin when it occurs. Our duty is to judge ourselves immediately when we sin. If we do not, God is not helpless. He Himself will judge us. According to New Testament principles, not only are we to judge ourselves when we sin, but our churches are to judge us if we fail to do so. Thus, if we do not put away our sin as it occurs and our churches do not deal with the unrepentant as they are required, God will judge both us and our churches. This is not something God may do; it is something He always does. At this very moment, the church in the English-speaking world, having sinned against God and having failed to judge itself, is under the judgment of God. What is that judgment?

Consider again the proposition: *When God is angry with*

His own people because of their unforsaken sin, He may force them into a state of spiritual drunkenness. This is the teaching set before us in Jeremiah 13. There are two similitudes in the first seventeen verses. The first similitude (vv. 1-11) deals with a linen waistband. Whether this is an actual incident that occurred or a vision that the prophet experienced is something we will leave for others to debate. Whether indeed the prophet took a long journey of some seven hundred miles to the River Euphrates, as some interpreters believe, or whether he went just a little distance from home to bury the linen waistband, is again something that men better qualified than myself can deal with. As I read the passage, this is what I see. The prophet is ordered by God to buy a new linen waistband. It is not just a belt to secure his clothing but something he wears touching his flesh, perhaps like an apron or a loin-cloth covering his private parts. It was doubtless what we refer to as underwear. He was to wear it for an unstated period of time which we are led to believe was not brief. At an appointed time he was commanded to take that garment that he had worn and had not washed, in faithfulness to the instruction from the Lord, and bury it, apparently in a moist place. Another period of time lapses and then he is commanded to dig it up. When he does so, he discovers exactly what you would expect. A piece of underclothing worn for weeks or even months and never washed must certainly rot when buried in a damp place.

Thus the prophet had an illustration that God wanted His people to feel. Just as Jeremiah wore this garment close to himself, God wanted them to understand that He drew His people close to Himself. But they, tragically, like the waistband, remained in an unwashed state. And because of their refusal to listen to His Word (verse ten), because of the stubbornness of their hearts, because they had gone after other gods, He judged them by sending them into exile. And

just as the linen garment rotted when it was in exile, so the Lord indicates to the people, this will be their end as well. We are informed in verse nine that the purpose God has in this is to destroy that which is most obnoxious in His sight—the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.

The second similitude is the similitude of spiritual drunkenness. Notice the words:

Say to them: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Every wineskin should be filled with wine. And if they say to you, "Don't we know that every wineskin should be filled with wine?" then tell them, "This is what the Lord says: I am going to fill with drunkenness all who live in this land, including kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets and all those living in Jerusalem. I will smash them one against the other, fathers and sons alike, declares the Lord. I will allow no pity or mercy or compassion to keep Me from destroying them." (Jeremiah 13:12-14)

Imagine it! Spiritual drunkenness forced by God Himself. Lest someone think this an isolated passage, note numerous other passages of a similar nature:

You have rejected us, O God; and burst forth upon us; you have been angry—now restore us! You have shaken the land and torn it open; mend its fractures, for it is quaking. You have shown your people desperate times; you have given us wine that makes us stagger (Ps. 60:1-3). Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord, the cup of His wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger (Isa. 51:17). I trampled the nations in My anger; in My wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground (Isa. 63:6).

Jeremiah speaks of this same mode of judgment in a later passage:

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take

from My hand this cup filled with the wine of My wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them." So I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom He sent me drink it. . . . Then tell them, "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Drink, get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you." (Jeremiah 25: 15-17, 27)

The Psalmist wrote: "In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; He pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs" (75:8). The patriarch Job spoke of drinking the wrath of the Almighty (21:20). Even John in the Revelation (16:19) refers to the cup of the wine of God's fierce wrath.

From these Scriptures and others it is evident that the forcing of nations to drink of the cup of the wine of God's wrath can be either a remedial or a final judgment. In Jeremiah 13 it is clearly remedial. Consider the words of verses sixteen and seventeen:

Give glory to the Lord your God, before He brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for light, but He will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom. But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive.

Note again our proposition: *When God is angry with the prayers of His people because of their unforsaken sin, He may force them into a state of spiritual drunkenness.*

In verse twelve God commands the prophet: "Say to them; 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Every wineskin should be filled with wine.'" The people regarded that as such a trite statement that their response to the prophet is a haughty one. Can't you just see the dignified,

well-known, and earnest prophet saying: "Every wineskin should be filled with wine." And the people arrogantly responding, saying: "Oh, good night, Jeremiah, if you can't say anything more important than that, if you don't know anything more significant to tell us than that the wineskins are to be filled with wine, why don't you just keep be quiet! We know perfectly well that every wineskin is to be filled with wine." Ah, yes, of course they knew that. But what they did not know was what the Lord meant when He said, "Every wineskin shall be filled with wine," for He was not talking about skins or bottles, but about them. Whenever the Lord indicates He is about to act in a divine judgment we better be careful that we do not respond with a haughty spirit.

The prophet had to make it plain to them that when he said every he meant every:

Then tell them, "This is what the Lord says: I am going to fill with drunkenness all who live in this land, including the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets and all those living in Jerusalem. I will smash them one against the other, fathers and sons alike, declares the Lord. I will allow no pity or mercy or compassion to keep me from destroying them." (Jerimiah 13:13-14)

The Cause of Spiritual Drunkenness

Having now completed these introductory matters, let me put in front of you this exploratory question, "What is the cause of spiritual drunkenness?" I trust you are learning, as I am, how urgent it is that we distinguish between those sins which are fruits and those sins which are roots. When men and women meet for a day of prayer and confession, it would be a tragedy if the only things dealt with were results and not causes. Our great problem with God is not merely what we do; our greater problem is what we are. We must repent not only of having sinned but of being sinners.

Have you learned to distinguish between root sins and fruit sins? It is not uncommon these days for men in ministry to be taken in adultery. Some of them have even appeared to repent of this sin, but it would be a rare instance when adultery was the root sin. It is most always the fruit. One can repent of the fruit and yet leave in place the root. And if the root sin is still there, other sins will soon appear. In dealing with fornicators and adulterers and others in various forms of sexual sins, it is most common for them to explain why they committed the sin. For instance, a man said to me, "If you knew the woman that I am married to you would understand why I had to find someone else. Even God Himself never intended me to be saddled with that miserable little wife."

Underneath almost all our sins there are deeper causes—roots. The root of a great many sins is pride. After all, the very essence of sin is self. It is me versus God. If in repentance I have only dealt with the result, but have never gone to the cause, my repentance is without eternal significance.

If you contemplated my earlier statement that God is especially grieved with the prayers of His people when they come from unrepentant hearts and that He may indeed give them tears to drink in great measure as a result, you will understand that people often repent of the fruits of sin while the roots of sin are still in place in the life. While I am not seeking to declare definitively what the roots of sin are, I can name the three root sins that appear in this passage: pride, stubbornness/rebellion, and unbelief. These are the very root sins Jude addresses in his epistle, especially in verses five to eight.

In this passage in Jeremiah, there is simply no question as to the real cause of God forcing the people into a state of spiritual drunkenness. Did you notice how many times throughout the chapter the issue of pride comes to the fore. In verse 9 it is as plain: "In the same way I will ruin the pride

of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.” In verse 12 we read: “Don’t we know that every wineskin should be filled with wine?” Here is arrogance indeed! In verse 15 it says: “Do not be arrogant, for the Lord has spoken. And verse 17 states: “But If you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride.”

Stubbornness is clearly pointed out in verse 10: “These wicked people, who refuse to listen to My words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them. . . .” Verse 11 speaks of their rebellious hearts when it says: “But they have not listened.” Verse 15 emphasizes the problem in calling to them: “Hear and pay attention.”

The third root of sin made so clear in this passage, the root of unbelief, is evident in verse 10 where it is said they “follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them. Verse 25 states: “You have forgotten Me and trusted in false gods.” Verse 27 declares, “Your adulteries and lustful neighings, your shameless prostitution! I have seen your detestable acts on the hills and in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you be unclean?”

We need to pause and ask, “Are there roots of sin in place in our lives?” And because none of us live purely private lives, but all have at least some corporate responsibilities, the question needs to be asked, “Are there root sins still in place at the College, at the Seminary, in the churches, in the denomination, in the corporate communities where we live and work?” The proposition I have been setting in front of you declares that *when God is angry with His people because of their unrepentant spirit over sin, He brings them into remedial judgment, and the judgment He brings them into may very well be that of spiritual drunkenness.*

The Effects of Spiritual Drunkenness

Let us just think about the words: spiritual drunkenness. Have you ever watched carefully the conduct of a drunk person? It is pretty well known. It doesn’t require a genius to enumerate the characteristics of the drunk, and so let me proceed to do so:

1) Drunken persons walk with great unsteadiness of foot.

This doesn’t need explanation, does it? We all know that when a person is stopped on suspicion of drunk driving, the police may order him to walk the white line on the side of the road. He may reel, stagger, and stumble, but if he is drunk he will not be able to walk that straight line.

Obviously, in the passage before us, the Lord is not speaking about physical drunkenness but spiritual drunkenness. Thus I ask this question: “Is it possible that our churches are under the remedial judgment of spiritual drunkenness?” I look at the church and I ask, “Is the church staggering? Is the church reeling? Does the church find it easy to walk the straight and the narrow?” I don’t mind telling you that I have convincing evidence that the church is staggering and reeling like a drunkard. She rushes in one direction after another, tripping over her drunken feet, in pursuit of first one novel doctrine and then another. She staggers about looking for some new method or innovation that will help her cause and doesn’t even know she is reeling. If you tell her that there was a time when the church had a voice in the world for good but that the world now has a voice in the church for evil, she looks at you through bleary eyes wondering why you speak so foolishly. If you insist that the church is much more influenced by the world than the world is by the church, she slobbers over herself as she stumbles away from godly counsel. In these tragic days, much of the church scarcely knows what the straight and narrow way is and certainly has no capacity to walk it.

2) Drunks are tragically affected by muddled thoughts and an inability to think clearly.

A drunken man will think and believe things that are absolutely absurd. The mind of the drunk plays tricks on him. He thinks he has spoken brilliantly and yet no one can even imagine what he said. He sets forth as truth things that are obviously lies. He may be informed of matters of great consequence affecting his life and that of his family for years to come, but he pays no attention to what is said; instead he seeks to focus his confused brain on some speck in the air which he is trying to grasp.

When I examine the words a drunken church is offering a hell-bent world I am often flabbergasted by the sheer nonsense that is set forth as gospel. One of the most unbelievable things ever declared in the history of the world is that a man can deny Jesus Christ as Lord, accept Him as Savior, and be a Christian. What tragic foolishness. Who but a drunk could ever make statements like that. And yet it is one of the prevailing opinions in the church today, and there are people ready to die for that kind of muddled theology. Oh, the tragedy of those who cannot even see what a mockery of the Almighty-God such teaching makes. They acknowledge that because God is sin-hating and righteous He is unable to receive unrepentant sinners into His presence and must consign them to an eternal hell. They then turn right around and have this very same God saving the unrepentant sinner from the penalty of hell without saving him from his problem which made hell necessary. Such thinking is not only perfectly ludicrous but wickedly wrong. Spiritual drunkenness—when the mind is impaired and the thoughts are muddled, and things are set forth as truth which are nothing but a lie—is a tragic state indeed. Surely, when people are believing such absurdities, you can feel nothing but great pity and compassion for them and realize they are under the judgment of God.

3) Persons who are drunk suffer severely impaired judgment.

A drunk is unable to ascertain reality, and thus when he is driving, he cannot judge the speed of his own car or the speed of cars coming toward him; he doesn't know his own location on the road, and he certainly doesn't know the location of others. Drunken persons are frequently guilty of gross exaggerations, and much of what they say must be taken with a grain of salt. A drunk may treat an honorable woman as a harlot and a harlot as his own mother. His judgment is so impaired he cannot follow directions, and while in that state, his own life is in frequent danger and those around him can never be secure.

What but spiritual drunkenness can explain the conduct of so many church-goers who listen to searching truths and severe biblical warnings from the lips of God's faithful messengers, and before their feet have even left the pew, their mouths are engaged in conversation concerning sporting events, the weather, dinner, or whatever, and all that God has said to them in the service is lost to their souls forever. When I hear pastors of some of our so-called evangelical churches say, "You can't practice church discipline today. Someone might sue you," I know their judgment is severely impaired. What does it matter if someone sues you? If God gives an order, why should I raise such nonsense as a protest against God? What but spiritual drunkenness can account for the wildly exaggerated reports of so many churches and workers? What of the evangelists who leave a church meeting claiming hundreds of converts when the angels of heaven have not had one single occasion to rejoice over lost ones turning to the Savior in that place? Look the church over and on every hand you will discover irrational judgments being handed down, things that are being done that are so wrong you would say to yourself, surely they know better! But no! They don't know better! Just as a drunk doesn't know better when he is driving down the road

swerving and weaving in and out, thinking that he is doing a marvelous job; suddenly he crashes and several are dead, and he says, "It wasn't my fault. I didn't do anything wrong." That's the condition of the church today—grievously impaired judgment. I listen to Christian leaders who are saying, "The world has brought us into this terrible mess. If the world would only just get straight!" No, don't kid yourself; the world is only doing what you would expect them to do. What is strange about a sinner sinning? It is the church which has brought the world to this dismal day in which we now live—a church whose judgment is badly impaired because God Himself has forced it into spiritual drunkenness.

4) Drunks are often incoherent and irrational in their speech.

It is often loud and slurred and difficult if not impossible to understand. A drunken person may extemporize for twenty-five minutes and yet not say one single thing that has meaning and significance. Often their singing must be characterized as bawdy for their words can be vile and their tunes raucous. Much of what you hear the drunk say just leaves you standing there in grief.

And what about the church? Do you think the church has become more spiritual than it used to be? The bawdy conduct that takes place in many so-called places of worship is almost beyond imagination. And what about irrational speech? We have listened to men preach, have concentrated on what they were saying, have tried to follow their every word, and have gone away saying, "Maybe he understood what he said, but I certainly did not." And the world itself, in innumerable instances, hasn't the faintest notion of what the church thinks it is saying. Even when you can understand what is said, groans may be forced from you as you realize the preacher's inability to distinguish between what he does and thinks and what God does and says.

5) Drunken persons are given to unprovoked fighting and abusive conduct.

There is a combativeness, a rage, a fierceness that seems to characterize the drunk. Many a dear woman has described her husband as a sweet-spirited and mild-mannered man when sober, but a raging, wild beast when drunk. The stories of drunken sons who have beat their praying mothers to death are among the most awful in all literature. A significant number of the murders being committed around us every year are the direct result of excessive alcohol in the brain. Who could ever even estimate the permanent injuries, both physical and mental, that the wives, the husbands, and the children of drunkards receive every single day of the year.

Would it be unjust to say that this spirit of combativeness and rage characterizes much of the church? What a tragedy that so many churches have their very beginnings in conflict. We live in a day when churches are splitting right and left, a day when Christians are battling one another over matters so inconsequential you wonder how they could possibly generate any heat on the subject; and yet when it comes to a truly critical issue, there are multitudes of the same supposed Christians who act as if it were of no concern whatsoever to them. What about the countless numbers of local church situations where there are members who won't speak to one another or members who always leave the sanctuary through a door other than the one where the pastor stands? And what about the jealousy and meanness of spirit that exists on inter-denominational levels? I ask, "How do you explain the circumstances in the church today if you reject the proposition before us?" If there was ever evidence of spiritual drunkenness, it is in the contemporary church!

6) Drunks very frequently suffer the loss of natural inhibitions and restraints.

The result is self-confidence, boasting, shameful conduct including exposing one's nakedness, urinating in the street, and all those general qualities of shamelessness which the Scriptures deplore.

Consider the matter of dress in today's church. The attire or lack thereof in which people enter the sanctuary of God leaves some of us almost dizzy in amazement and certainly suggests nothing short of drunkenness. The boasting that takes place in denominational circles and among evangelicals in their gatherings is distressing indeed. The English-speaking nations of the world are in the midst of one of the most tragic moral and spiritual declensions of all time, and yet we have prominent leaders telling us the church is thriving and has never been stronger or more vibrant. Have you ever attended a meeting where the arrogance was so evident you declared to yourself, "This meeting makes me sick at heart. It is the last such meeting I will ever attend. I cannot stand all this godless boasting." Some pastors have given up attending their local ministerial meetings merely because there is so much of the wicked spirit of one-upmanship there. Boasting, pride, arrogance, the loss of natural modesty and decorum, these are qualities of drunkenness, never the qualities of godliness.

7) Drunks are often slovenly in appearance and in personal hygiene.

A drunk will deck himself out in what he supposes beautiful attire, thinking he has never looked better in all his life, not knowing that his filthy trousers are unzipped, his shirt torn down the front, his tie halfway around his neck and over his shoulder, and his hair matted like a bird's nest. He may have vomited all over himself and wallowed for hours in his own filth without any awareness or concern. He

can be foul and stinking without the faintest notion of the repulsiveness of his appearance and stench.

It used to be understood that the church of Jesus Christ was to be as a bride, without spot and without blemish, but that description hardly fits much of what poses as church today. To a significant degree, it is nearly impossible to discern the church from the world. As far as can be told, the divorce rate in the church is virtually the same as the divorce rate in the world, as are the adultery rate, the fornication rate, and the abortion rate. In some so-called Christian institutions, the percentage of practicing homosexuals and lesbians exceeds that of the percentage in the world. Abortion, substance abuse, child abuse, and sins of every form seem rampant in major segments of the church. Some of our preachers are licentious men who live in the very depth of their iniquities while busily exhorting others to holiness. The world laughs at Christianity, mocking the church for its hypocrisy and belittling it for its vanishing impact on society. Meanwhile, the church responds by denouncing the world for its stupidity and wickedness, not even realizing that its own loss of ability to serve as salt and light is the precise cause of calamitous circumstances in which we all totter toward final judgment. Oh, how awful to be drunk and not know it! Oh, the tragedy of appearing blemished before God and man while still blaming others for the degenerating condition of society!

8) Frequent drunkenness nearly always results in alienation.

Drunks suffer alienation from those who are nearest and dearest—wives, children, parents, life-long friends. And of course the alienation results in increased longing for still more and more alcohol.

There is a tremendous amount of alienation occurring in the church. Oh, the tragedy of living in a time, like that of the prophets, when the person most likely to be excommuni-

cated from his church is the person who incessantly calls for the church to repent. In a given church there may be dozens of people living in vile and loathsome open sin, and nobody will do anything about them. But let some God-fearing believer come along and call for church discipline, and not just mention it but press hard on the issue, and that person will probably be removed from the membership of the church. Fervent believers are not infrequently considered troublemakers and branded as judgmental. Persons these days who take a strong stand for Christ and for the purity of His church frequently pay an awful price. Oh, the pity of the alienation of spiritual drunkenness, when in our staggering about, in our vomiting on ourselves, in all our vile conduct, we isolate from us those who would call us to true repentance.

9) Sluggishness and prolonged drunken stupors are the regular results of drunkenness.

Drunks fall asleep at the most inopportune times and in the most awful places. In a desperate moment, when their total senses should be fully responsive, they nod their heads, crumple in the dirt, and sleep as an innocent child. Drunkards can lose all memory of entire blocks of their lives, having no knowledge of where they lay or how long they lay there.

Here we are, living on the very brink of what is probably the greatest crisis of modern times, and the church is nodding its head, folding its hands, and slumbering yet a little longer. All around the church, and not infrequently within the church, destruction proceeds at a terrific pace, while multitudes of the watchmen that God appointed to stand upon His wall not only fail to shout the alarm but slumber peacefully at their posts. Thousands of our preachers see their greatest duty as providing a little more comfort for a church already so comfortable that you would sup-

pose they were engaged in a sleeping contest. The ladies of the church may gather in a business meeting where the most important decision made is to use pink napkins rather than yellow at the homecoming banquet while an entire world gasps for a single drop of the Water of Life. The men's group meets on Saturday to discuss the best techniques for fishing in the local lakes while the gospel nets lie unused on the decks of the good ship Grace. The preacher appears at his stand on the Sabbath morning and in sleepy tones discourses politely on some half-believed event from the past without any conscious concern for a multitude of parishioners languishing on the benches before him, soon to enter a Christless eternity. Oh, the tragedy of the drunken stupor that has befallen the church.

10) Drunkards have an awful ability not only to destroy the lives of those around them but their own bodies as well.

They may do this by bringing on themselves such diseases as cirrhosis of the liver and other ills associated with their dissipation. They do this by greatly endangering their lives and safety in their drunken reveling, fighting, staggering about, driving, etc. You may remember with grief the awful account that appeared in the newspapers across the land some years ago when one of our famous healing-evangelists died of acute alcoholism in a San Francisco hotel room.

Need I set before you evidence that a drunken church, like a drunken individual, leaves a wake of destruction behind it, and if it persists in its wickedness, death itself will occur? Did Judah and Jerusalem heed the cry of Jeremiah? Will the church hear the warning now?

Perhaps you are unready and/or unwilling to accept this analysis of the condition of the church. But surely you realize that there has to be some accurate explanation for the tragic condition into which the evangelical church has

fallen. Do you have a better explanation than this? Absolutely the best interpretation to be found anywhere is the old-fashioned biblical interpretation declaring: *When God is angry with His people because of their unrepentant sin, He turns them over to remedial judgment, and that remedial judgment may include spiritual drunkenness.* The evidence is overwhelming that we are in fact under a dual judgment from God: we are under the judgment of spiritual drunkenness, forced at God's hand; we are also under the remedial judgment of the withdrawal of God's face of favor from our churches.

The Cure of Spiritual Drunkenness

Please focus again on the issue of root sins and particularly the three root sins in this passage: pride, stubbornness/ rebellion, unbelief.

Who can deny the overwhelming evidence that our churches are guilty of great pride? Are not many of us guilty of this same sin as individuals? God Himself has shown our guilt on more than one occasion, but few have put away this loathsome sin. Our problem, however, is not so much that we think ourselves innocent of the sin as it is that we regard the sin of pride as so common and of such small consequence that we do not concern ourselves unduly with it. Oh, the evil of the human heart. Oh, our capacity for deceiving ourselves. Some of us have, by the grace of God, made some little progress in conquering sins of the flesh, but oh, the grievous error of sins of the spirit. In this passage it is crystal clear that God's accusation against His people was not for sins of the flesh but sins of the spirit. I ask you concerning your own heart, "Is it possible that you are in the grip of pride?" Pride is described as a *breeder* sin. When pride is in place it breeds numerous other sins. We need not only examine our own hearts for pride, but we need thoughtfully and prayerfully examine the corporate lives of the

institutions with which we are connected and ask, "O God, have You been forced to bring us under remedial judgment because of pride?"

It is terribly sad to observe, as one travels from place to place to speak, how many churches and schools consider themselves the greatest and the best. God is not going to let this pride pass unnoticed. He can't! His very nature forbids it! He always holds the proud in heart at a distance. He draws near only to the broken and the contrite. "For this is what the high and lofty One says—He who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isa. 57:15). Would you enjoy personal revival? Do you yearn for it? Do you pray for it? While God won't draw near to the proud in heart, He finds the broken and contrite irresistible. Brokenness and contrition are like giant magnets drawing God toward the humble. Have you dealt with pride? Is it gone from your personal life? Have you put it away corporately?

What about stubbornness? It is a grievous problem as far as God is concerned. Do you remember the words Samuel was forced to speak to King Saul: "For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry" (1 Sam. 15:23). Some say, "It is true I have a rebellious and stubborn streak, but you should know my father," implying its inconsequential nature. It may be inconsequential in your sight, but in the sight of God stubbornness and rebellion are likened to witchcraft and idolatry—sins no serious believer could ever regard as minor in the eyes of God. Is there stubbornness in you? Do you have a rebellious streak?

What about unbelief? The Bible clearly teaches the necessity of waiting on God, seeking His face, humbling ourselves, praying, and looking to Him to do great and mighty things; but unbelief rushes in where angels fear to tread and

says, "Lord, I just conceived of this great work that I am going to do for You, now bless it." All around the world churches are being built not on prayer, not on waiting on God, but on novelty methods and theologies. Many leaders have even hired Philistines to tell them how to run God's church. In multitudes of places the prayer meeting has either been eliminated or left to a handful of elderly saints who still need something to do in the church and are too old or too traditional to catch up with the times. Sheer unbelief is at the very heart of much of what the church is and does these days.

The proposition set before you, based on the text of Jeremiah 13 and developed in harmony with the whole tone of Scripture, declares that when God is angry with His people because of their unforsaken sin, He may force them into a state of spiritual drunkenness. The evangelical church is staggering about and behaving itself as only a drunken church can! As if that were not enough, God has turned His face from us because we turned our faces from Him.

Notice these potent words:

Hear and pay attention, do not be arrogant, for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God before He brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for light, but He will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom. But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive. (Jeremiah 13:15-17)

Why does the prophet speak so pathetically? Because he knew something that Judah and Jerusalem did not know. Possibly you don't know it either: *an unheeded remedial judgment will, in God's time, turn into a final judgment.* When God forces His people into a state of spiritual drunkenness it is not because He has abandoned them forever but

because He wishes to provide them evidence of their grievous departure from Him and time and place for full and lively repentance. Countless numbers have already perished in their sins while a drunken church has dissipated its energies and slumbered through its opportunities. How many more must suffer the agonies of uncontrolled lusts lashing the world while the church takes its ease in error? When will we hear the voice of God calling us, "Hear and pay attention, do not be arrogant?" When will we, in the deepest possible repentance, flee from all those sins that have forced our righteous Maker to turn us into those made drunk on the wine of His fierce wrath? Will we force God to turn our present gloom into deep darkness, or will we repent while His voice of mercy sounds in our ears?

Author

Richard Owen Roberts is author of several books, including *Revival*, and an itinerant preacher. He directs the work of International Awakening Ministries, Inc., in Wheaton, Illinois. The substance of this article was delivered as a sermon at the Texas Baptist Men's Cedars of Lebanon Conference, at Mount Lebanon, September 6, 1992, and also at a day of prayer and fasting at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, January 21, 1993.

For additional material on revival, especially by the above author, write:

International Awakening Press
P. O. Box 232
Wheaton, IL 60189 U.S.A.
Phone: 1 (708) 653-8616

In our biblical desire for revival, we must refuse to seek any experience which proposes to eliminate our natural weakness.

Walter J. Chantry

In any biblical revival the norm is heightened; it is not suspended while another type of Christianity is introduced.

Iain H. Murray

Revival means the work of God restoring to a . . . church, in a manner out of the ordinary, those standards which the New Testament sets forth as being entirely ordinary.

James I. Packer

It is useless for large companies of believers to spend long hours begging God to send revival. Unless we intend to reform we may as well not pray.

A. W. Tozer

An indispensable sign of true revival is that the Word of God grows mightily and prevails—it spreads widely and grows in power.

Erroll Hulse
