

Worshiping God in

Spirit and Truth

A Magazine for Understanding God's Truth

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Why Businesses Don't Succeed Without Customers

(A Frank Look at the Success of the Drug Lords and Cartels)

What God Says about Man's Habits, Addictions, and Other Excesses

Do the customers share in the guilt for the crimes
and deaths related to the drug culture?

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From the desk of:

The Pastor

Simple Facts about Businesses

When I was a high school educator, I occasionally stepped aside from the English/Literature lessons I was teaching in order to give my students some “real life” lessons about why their education was important ... regardless of what they did with their lives beyond high school. One lesson in particular had to do with what businesses would expect of them as employees and why the businesses would expect those particular things from them. I’ll briefly review that lesson for you.

First, *the business does not exist just so you can have a job*. The business is somebody’s plan and goal to make money for themselves, their families, and whoever makes an investment in the business’s continued existence. When you appear for an interview for a particular job, the owner or manager will consider your level of preparation for the job and the level at which you can enter that business’s workforce. Not all applicants are equally prepared to do so. The employer needs skill and dependability. Why?

Second, the owner/manager assesses *how your level of skills and preparation will help to make money for the business*. So, hiring *you* has to do with the value *you* bring to the company’s ability to continue to exist because *you* represent an integral part of the business’s profits and continued existence. As long as *you* are profitable to that plan and goal, then *you* will continue to enjoy employment with that business on some level. As one of my former bosses was accustomed to telling his employees on a regular basis: “This ain’t no d... beauty contest. The name of the game is *money!*”

Third, your ability of earning a higher salary depends upon your ability *to learn the business and acquire additional skills valuable to the business*. Minimum wage typically has been the *entry level* salary. *Experience* represents growth and development that adds worth to your employment. Your objective as an employee is to become the person who is *inexpendable*. Literally, you want to be the person without whom the company cannot economically function. You would be the last to be laid off.

I got an “education” in all of this when I was a young man working as a helper in a sheet metal company. I had been with the company for a little over a year. It had gotten to the point that I was helping in the orientation and training of new helpers that were frequently hired. They were paid the same hourly wage as I was. One day I decided to ask my boss for a raise.

The first thing he said was this: “You helpers aren’t worth a d... when you first come here. When you finally get to where you’re worth your wages, you quit and go to work for someone else. *All I’m doing is running a school for helpers*. I’ll think about it.” A week later, I was raised from \$1.25 an hour to \$1.35 an hour ... an 8% raise. That amounted to about \$10.13 per week. Over the course of a year, it was about \$526.50. At the time, gasoline sold for about 35 cents a gallon for what was known as “ethyl” (100% octane) – the “high test” or “premium” gasoline of the time.

I was grateful for the separation between myself and the “newbies.” However, I knew that I now had to think and perform more like a *mechanic* instead of a *helper*. And, my productivity had to increase. That is pretty standard fare in bus-

iness practices because your pay represents an investment in its future.

What does God say in the Bible about such things? I will briefly summarize Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:12-27, and Luke 12:37-48; 16:1-12:

- Responsibility is given according to one's ability (Matt. 25); if not, the individual is expected to perform any reasonable task assigned (Luke 19).
- The objective is to be profitable – producing to the maximum of your ability level ... not the minimum. Do not allow laziness, slackness, or any other personal attribute to hinder your productivity (Luke 16).
- Unprofitability has its own reward ... the loss of personal gain/reward and further opportunity to be part of something greater than yourself.
- Personal stewardship is an extraordinary responsibility and must be undertaken with zealous regard for the trust and confidence invested in you. Such a position represents an investment in your future.
- If you cannot be trusted to faithfully perform the tasks assigned to you, then you will not be trusted enough to be promoted to higher levels, and you stand to lose your stewardship position altogether.
- Ultimately, if you are unfaithful in matters of the “flesh,” how can God trust you in matters of the “spirit”?

Simple Facts about Customers

Another lesson I taught my students was about the role customers play in the life of a business. It's relatively simple: The customer is interested in the product(s) offered by the business. They expect a certain level of quality, a certain level of satisfaction, and a certain level of service. They do not expect that the employee will treat them as though serving them is a favor ... as opposed to an opportunity to assure that they will be repeat customers.

Employees who are rude to customers, or cause them frustration, run the risk of losing them as customers. It's an equation: Fewer customers = fewer profits = need to reduce/change the work force. Any reasonable owner/manager will investigate the reasons for the problem. If the steward (employee) is the problem, guess who has to be replaced. The other equation is just as simple: Additional customers = more profits = need to increase the work force = possible advancement for productive employees.

A business that has no customers has no business. The customers' participation in the life of a business is essential to that business's continued existence. Watch the stock market. Note how they either gain or lose points. The loss of those points, for whatever reason, is a threat to the existence of that business. No business = no customers.

I learned something in a college class about corporate culture that is also applicable to this discussion. I will simplify it for you:

- The entrepreneur's primary interest is in creating something to fill a need. The need represents the potential customer base.
- Because the entrepreneur is a creator, he will eventually need a business manager to take care of the product distribution and the personnel needed to do so. The manager loves to manage.
- Because the manager loves to manage, sales people have to be hired to create a market for the product(s) to be handled and distributed. A sales manager has to be hired to organize and maintain an adequate sales force. Sales people love to sell in order to create a repeat customer base.
- Among all of that “business,” various types of employees have to be hired as support forces for the entrepreneurs, managers, and sales people. Some love to work in research and development, some in human resources and accounting, some in sales, some in service, *et cetera*.

Making this “culture” work takes great skill and devotion to the product and the consumers of the product. Bad “links” in the employee chain have to be found and either repaired or replaced. Why? Because failure to maintain the “culture” of the business opens up the possibility that the business’s days are numbered. Watch “Undercover Boss” to understand this better. You can learn quite a bit about the dynamics of the business/employee relationship.

Profits and Benefits

The “profit margin” determines how much capital can be used for employee recruitment. It also involves wages and benefits. When the “profit margin” allows it, the business decides how to allocate the profits: more employees or higher wages; higher wages or more benefits; expansion or remodel.

If a community provides plenty of qualified prospects, the business might or might not be concerned with the employee turnover. If the community does not provide such prospects, the business might be more concerned with grooming and rewarding employees for long term employment – more *job security*. The “profitable” employee will be more appreciated and more likely to make the cut. Others, not so much.

Recently, for example, Walmart began to close over 200 stores worldwide. Why? It appears that their decision to *raise their minimum wage* had a “trickle down” effect on their profit margin. Higher wages and better benefits cost them too much to allow them to maintain *marginally* efficient and/or profitable stores. Over 10,000 employees will be losing their jobs in the next few months. Other companies like United Technologies, Nabisco, and Pfizer (pharmaceuticals) are leaving the United States to countries where their profits and existence will not be affected by high wages and benefits, corporate taxes, and unions.

This is an example of employee, community, and business being affected by decisions that have to be made in order to extend the existence of a business. The business does not exist merely to provide jobs for people and communities. At the center of these moves is the principle that the name of the game is *money*.

You cannot drive your company into perpetual debt beyond its ability to meet its liabilities. The most effective way to handle that problem is to cut the cost of doing business – which generally focuses on reducing expenditures, employees, salaries, and/or benefits. Somewhere in the bargain it might require layoffs of employees. *Your need for a job will be balanced against the business’s need to survive*. As the Carrier Air Conditioning representative told the employees recently about its move to Monterey, Mexico: “It is a business decision.” Guess who the “winner” is most of the time.

Who Has the Money?

Entrepreneurs either have the money or know how to get their hands on it. Some of the advice I have read about going into business for yourself includes the idea that you should have at least three years’ worth of money on hand to sustain you and your business while you are developing your customer base. It takes time to cultivate a relationship with a customer base even when they want/need your product. How you do business is as important as what your business is.

You also have to select the proper community in which to put your business – proper in the sense that you need a community that needs/wants your product and has the financial ability to support it. You would be ill-served if you decided to put a high-end clothing store in the middle of government housing projects. Why? *Money*. It’s the nature of the “beast.”

Those who have more talent and creativity to offer the business will be paid more. As the business’s wealth increases, their ability to expand also increases. As they expand, they are able to provide more employment opportunities to more communities. Sam Walton of Walmart and Sam’s Club has done exactly that.

Read Genesis 13:2. Abraham was a very rich man. Read Genesis 14:14. With his riches, Abraham supported 318 fighting men, their wives, and families. If each man had one wife and two children, Abraham would have been supporting almost *1300* people. Yet, Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, had to work for his mother’s brother, Laban, for wages (read Genesis 29:15-30) even though Jacob was the heir-in-waiting of Abraham’s estate.

Notice in Genesis 30:25-28 the way Laban reacted to the way Jacob's employment with him had increased Laban's wealth. Notice Laban's offer: Name your price. However, it was Laban's intent to take advantage of Jacob's offer for continued employment (vv. 29-36). During the 14 years that Jacob served Laban in order to marry his daughter, Rachel, he had applied himself to learning as much about cattle and sheep as he could. He wanted to be like his grandfather and father before him. Laban thought he had the advantage over Jacob. But, Jacob was a resourceful entrepreneur.

Notice Jacob's "business plan" in vv. 37-43. Notice the results in Genesis 31:1, 2. Why was this true? Read vv. 3-16. Laban had attempted to steal everything from Jacob in order to keep him in his employment. Laban thought he had set up Jacob for failure because he thought Jacob was stupid for making the deal he made. Jacob was a step ahead of Laban because of his relationship with God.

This represents two pictures of how the "rich" get "richer." Some of the "rich" are schemers and tricksters. Others are genuinely honest and talented at what they do because they have extraordinary knowledge of how the money game is played. We see this played out over and over in the world of politics when all of the "rich" are thrown into one pile and made the object of the politicians' schemes to "level the playing field" for the ordinary man relative to the re-distribution of wealth. The bottom line is simple: He who controls the purse strings controls the distribution of the purse's contents.

Why would a rich man like Donald Trump self-fund his campaign to become the next U. S. President? To avoid being controlled by the holders of other purse strings! He says that he understands how the game is played. Unfortunately, so do the politicians who line up at the money "troughs" of the rich and influential donors. They know that the rich want something, and the politician is willing to "promise" that something for the donations and the votes it will bring. Trump, apparently, does not want his political platform to be controlled by others. *Is his approach really any different?* After all, he once

provided a "trough" from which politicians and others could come and feed.

What Does All of This Mean?

My objective in pursuing this discussion is to impress upon you the relationships among the business owners, their employees, and their customers. The one overwhelming "truth" of this discussion is that the business cannot exist without the customers. It does not matter how great the product is or how efficient the employees are: The business cannot exist without the customers.

That is even true in a program such as we offer free to the inquiring public. If no one consumes what we produce, then it is as if we do not even exist! All of our work is in vain. If the consuming public is not affected whatsoever by what we produce for their consumption, then our reason for "business" makes no difference at all.

In the articles in this issue, we are going to explore that premise and apply it to why drug lords and drug cartels enjoy perennial success all over the world. What would happen if the governments of the world were to legalize, tax, and regulate the lords' and cartels' products? Would addictions, turf wars, and the like disappear? To what degree do the customers share in the guilt for the crimes and deaths related to the drug traffic culture – legal or otherwise? If the business cannot exist without the customers, are the customers as big a problem as the lords and cartels?

Finally, what does God say about man's habits, addictions, and other excesses? The truth be known, it is a safe bet that the drug traffic culture lords and customers could care less. That attitude notwithstanding, God is not folding up His "business" and refusing to continue to offer His own "product" that removes the "existential threat" presented by the lords, cartels, and customers. All of their present success is a trap of their own making. "Court" will soon be called to order. If they don't change, then they can eat, drink, and be merry because they will die. As strange as that might otherwise seem, it is God's own revelation about how He will ultimately deal with those whose "business" is to destroy the lives of others. Count on it! Read on to find out why.

A Frank Look at the Success of the Drug Lords and Cartels

According to <http://www.drugpolicy.org/drug-war-statistics>, the United States (Local, State, and Federal governmental bodies) spends more than \$51 **Billions** annually on the war on drugs. If that number had been the average over the past 40 years, we would have spent close to \$2.5 **Trillion** during that time. How much per day would that have been in that 14,610-day period? Is \$171+ **Million per day** in the ballpark? Based on our present population of 330 Million people, that would have cost every man, woman, and child \$7,576.00. That money includes the arrest and incarceration of more than **1.5 Million nonviolent** drug offenders ... not to mention those who are **violent** (based on 2014 statistics). For what kinds of socially beneficial causes could we have used that money? If it is an **unending** war, is it worth it? Many famous and powerful people have fought against the drug lords and cartels.

This is the scope of the problem presented by those who are involved in purchasing and trafficking illegal drugs just in the USA. It is necessary, therefore, to discuss this “business” that can perennially withstand such an onslaught from Local, State, and Federal law enforcement. Merely trying to win the war on drugs is big “business”! Why does the drug “business” succeed year after year? **Repeat and new customers!** So, this discussion is **not** about a curious teenager who is trying out a “drug” for the first time ... and gets caught. It is about those who are regular, loyal customers of the illegal drug market. How much blame do **they** share in the crimes and deaths that occur in the drug culture? **“Business” cannot survive and thrive if it has no customers.**

Basic Statistics

Let me paint a basic picture of what I have garnered from the above-cited website. The basic point I want to make is that Local, State, and Federal governments are trending toward **legalizing, taxing, and regulating** the drug traffic. Let’s look at a few statistics in order to understand why I make such a statement:

- ✚ If California decides to legalize, tax, and regulate just the marijuana trade (as have Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington), they will realize more than \$1.4 **Billions** a year in revenue.
- ✚ If current illegal drugs were taxed like alcohol and tobacco, governments in the USA would collectively

realize almost \$47 **Billions** per year in revenue. Some conservative estimates say that \$88 **Billions** per year could also be realized from reduced law enforcement costs and tax revenues together.

- ✚ If the 2014 population of Americans jailed for marijuana law violations (700,993 – 88% of which was for possession only) were released from prison, Local, State and Federal governments could save about \$70 per day (on average) to house, guard, and feed each one.
- ✚ On average, it costs \$25,251 to incarcerate a federal prisoner for one year. In 2014, there were 2,224,400 Ameri-

cans incarcerated for all manner of crimes – 1 out of every 111 adults.

- ✚ Fifty-seven percent of the State prison population incarcerated for drug offenses is Black and Latino, even though their rate of drug sales and usage is similar to Whites.
- ✚ 23 States and the District of Columbia allow for medical use of marijuana. This includes the marijuana extract that has none of the effects of regular marijuana use (smoking). Four States have approved legalizing, taxing, and regulating marijuana.
- ✚ 20 States have decriminalized marijuana for simple possession of small amounts (website: The War on Drugs at a Glance).

What does all of this governmental maneuvering mean? Simply put, it looks as though the various levels of government are maneuvering toward being able to leverage a “victory” out of a huge defeat.

Are Legalization, Taxation, and Regulation the Answers to the Problem?

Will legalization get rid of drug cartels? No, it will legalize them for tax and regulation purposes only. Will it reduce the number of addicts? No, it will make it easier for addicts to acquire their “candy.” Will it reduce crime? No, a drug-addicted society will be less productive and will continue to resort to crime to feed their “need” – they will not be readily employable ... only marginally, at best. I know of a manufacturing business that advertised the opening of 250 jobs. Over 2,500 applicants took drug tests with their applications. Only about 25 were considered readily employable.

In fact, the government will be so shortsighted in this grab for money and control that it will not see the looming danger presented by the impending rise in addiction and the far-reaching

effects it will have on the productivity of the citizens. Rehab programs will increase. A different kind of drug crimes will emerge. Social, educational, and moral problems will metastasize. Why do I say such things? I understand the Law of Unintended Consequences.

It is predictable. One of the hallmarks of what is called a “righteous” life (just, upright, virtuous, moral) is that it requires straight thinking and a humble spirit. Where that goes lacking, the fabric of society is torn and damaged. Such damage is usually difficult to repair as quickly as it was damaged because of the far-reaching consequences society suffers.

As Proverbs 15:4 puts it: “... Perverseness is a breach of the spirit.” The perversity that drives someone to constantly crave anything that causes him/herself to lose control of his/her thought processes breaks and crushes that part of him/herself that is profitable to him/herself and others ... having been addicted to pain killers because of a medical problem notwithstanding.

The root meaning of the word “perverseness” has to do with turning someone’s world “upside down” or “aside from its assigned purpose”: “The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them” (Prov. 11:3). Without the integrity to resist the addiction, you fall into a type of merciless slavery that is loath to free you. You become useless to yourself and to society at large. *It is predictable.* I do not need an endless parade of statistics to foretell the outcome of this. *It is predictable!*

If Proverbs 20:1 describes wine and strong drink as being “mocker” and “brawler” (RSV), then it rightly concludes that those who abuse those two alcohol-based drinks are “led astray.” In such condition, they are not wise – they have lost control of their straight thoughts and humble spirit. Such a loss of integrity invites catastrophe!

Now, how much more of a problem can you expect from such *highly addictive* substances as heroin, methamphetamines, et cetera? New Hampshire is awash with heroin problems – nearly 400 a year are dying from heroin overdoses. Heroin is cheap ... some saying that it is cheaper than a six-pack of beer. And ... *marijuana* is more and more recognized by leading experts as being a “gateway” drug to those highly addictive substances.

Notice what the website The War on Drugs has to say about marijuana's increased potency, which is receiving higher demand now that it is legal in four States:

Those who support the legalization of marijuana say that the data are skewed because testing was only performed on marijuana of specific geographic origins in the 1960s and 1970s, and therefore isn't representative of marijuana potency overall. Officials obtained samples from a type of Mexican marijuana that is known to contain low levels of THC – 0.4 to 1 percent. *When these levels are compared to other types of marijuana, it looks as if potency levels have risen in the last 30 years.*

Typical THC levels, which determine marijuana potency, range from 0.3 to 4 percent. However, some specially grown plants can contain THC levels up to **25 percent**, leading to a call by some users for producers to put out mellow Mary Jane. ...The time at which the plant is harvested affects the level of THC. Additionally, *female varieties have higher levels of THC than male varieties* (For more information, see: www.drugwarfacts.org and www.drugpolicy.org/drug-war-statistics; emphases added).

It is but a small marketing ploy to advertise more potent content in your marijuana than that of the competition. It is but a small marketing ploy to advertise that your marijuana plant is *female* as opposed to *male*. If the customer craves a more potent "Mary Jane" and has the money to support his/her habit, then the market will eventually supply the demand ... unless the potency is legislated at certain levels in order to reduce the addictive effect and the potency of this gateway drug. Then the potency issue moves from the "legal" marijuana to the "illegal" marijuana ... and the drug war will continue on a different field. In the process, you will have legalized the drug cartels' regular "business" and opened the door for a more potent product, illegality notwithstanding.

Proverbs 14:12

The problem with those who do not desire to retain "God" in their thoughts and ways (Rom. 1:28) boils down to the way they perceive "life." The *libertarians* advocate full individual freedom of thought and action. They generally believe that people ought to be able to do or say anything they want. If you want to be a drug addict, that's fine. If you want to express your sexual side in all manner of "promiscuous" liaisons, knock yourself out. Individual rights supersede the rights of all others. *Liberty* demands it, they say.

Regardless of what you think relative to the Declaration of Independence's claim that the Creator gave us the unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the God of the Bible did not give you the right to destroy yourself through all manner of moral and righteous abandonment. He is a God of *life*, not death. He did not construct a plan of *life* for His creation just to have it destroyed by allowing you to do anything you want to do and live by any kind of self-imposed life-style you desire. **He never intended for you to be the slave of anything or anybody!**

And ... that libertarian concept is very much behind the religious concepts of "competency of the individual soul in matters of religion" and "the individual priesthood of the believer to read and interpret Scripture for him/herself as the Holy Spirit leads him/her." How has that worked in getting 32,000+ "Christian" denominations to accomplish what Paul preaches in Ephesians 4:1-16? It *seems* right that the individual should have such privilege, but ... what has been the "fruit" of it? Division. Individualism over unity of Spirit.

The libertarian might very well quote the Apostle Paul as saying to Christians: "...You have been called unto *liberty*..." (Gal. 5:13). In an incomplete statement of Paul's concept, they would fall prey to the lesson taught in Proverbs 14:12: "There is a way which *seems right*, but the end thereof [is] the [way] of *death* (KJV; emphases added). They will have neglected to add the rest of Paul's statement in which his full lesson is contained: "...only *use not liberty for an occasion unto the flesh, but by love serve one another*" (emphases added). What is so important in that? Read 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 and Romans 8:5-9.

What do they say and mean? Is there a context in which one's *liberty* finds true expression without leading to *slavery and death*?

It is necessary for us to be concerned with all ways that *seem* right but lead to ultimate harm and death ... to unintended consequences. Find one good thing that comes from the drug traffic – even that which is legal, taxed, and regulated. Some north European countries have legalized, taxed, and regulated prostitution. Their crime rates decreased as a result ... if for no other reason, prostitution is no longer a crime. Does that, therefore, make prostitution a pillar of goodness in society? Could we legalize, tax, and regulate murder for hire? How about child pornography? Will we eventually legalize polygamy and polyamory (group marriage)?

Well, some are proposing “safe zones” for drug addicts to come to for their “hits” with clean needles and, hopefully, therapy in order to get them off drugs. Using “dirty: needles out on the street causes an increase in HIV and related health issues. The great concern is that these “safe zones” will give them a “safe” place where most of them will continue to fall into deeper and deeper dependency ... until they snuff out their own hopeless lives with an overdose.

If we fall for the same old trick that has been used, we will discover that the purveyors of the *unacceptable* will package it with some other *more acceptable* vehicle in order to condition society to accept more and more perverse behavior ... drugs, sex, et cetera. It has been done with abortion, same sex marriage, health care, and mounds and mounds of other governmental legislation. Liberal theologians and politicians believe that the whims of culture should dictate the laws and behavior of society. Yet, it is paradoxical that so much “liberty” requires so many laws and regulations.

Cal Thomas wrote in July 2003:

...Constitutional rewriting will lead to ...a Constitution that means to liberal judges what the Bible means to liberal theologians – a document to be tailored to the whims of culture, and not the reverse (Tribune Media Services: “Court Took a Journey With no Map”).

George F. Will wrote in the same month and year:

Impatient “progressives” ... always are pushing to keep church practices congruent with whatever secular culture considers advanced thinking (The Washington Post: “Gay Issue Partly About Snobbery”).

It would not surprise if, in the not so distant future, we should see those who worship at the altars of the self and addictive substances moving into great edifices, setting up rituals, and hiring priests to conduct worship services in smoke-filled, drug-laden halls of what could become the new “high church” of the future. Yes, there is a pun intended.

This is not as far-fetched as it might seem because there is a cannabis culture that has been in vogue for decades. It is called *Rastafarianism*. It is a religion. It has congregations in the United States.

The “Gospel” According to Rastafarianism

During the 1920s and 30s, a Jamaican revolutionary named Marcus Garvey led the liberation movement to free Jamaica from the British rule, which was seen as being oppressive and racist because it sought to stamp out the marijuana business that degraded Britain's much-needed supply of sugar. One of Garvey's most oft-repeated lines was: “Look to Africa, when a black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is at hand!” Garvey had earlier founded the African Orthodox Church as an alternative to the White Churches' European-centric teachings.

In November 1930, a little-known black African man named Ras Tafari Makonnen was to be crowned king of Ethiopia. When he was crowned, he became known as Emperor Haile Selasse I, which means “power of the Trinity.” For many in Jamaica, Garvey's “biblical prophecy” had come to pass. From Selasse's former name a serious religious movement was born: *Rastafarianism*.

Here is a sample of the Rastafarian “gospel”:

This cannabis religion requires a believer to consume and distribute cannabis as sacrament and medicine. It acknowledges

the prophecies of the Christian Old Testament, with an important nod to the New Testament. It takes prophecies of the ancient biblical texts, fusing them with the liberation writings of African-American philosopher and activist Marcus Garvey. This is the story of our great present-day cannabis religion and the sacrifice and struggle that brought it to the forefront of our movement (the rest of the information for this part of this article is paraphrased from the website:

<http://www.cannabisculture.com/content/2009/08/29/rastafari-secret-history-marijuana-religion#prettyPhoto>).

Here is where you get the *unacceptable* being linked with something *acceptable*. Much of the battle against British rule had to do with the British determination to stamp out the marijuana culture in Jamaica because of the damage it did to the sugar business that provided a major part Britain's sugar imports. Garvey's piece of prophetic enlightenment was a validation of "God's" presence among the oppressed former slaves. How so? That part of this puzzle is understood by the teachings of the next Jamaican "prophet," Leonard Howell.

Howell immigrated to America in the early 1900s, eventually settling in Harlem, NY in 1924. In 1929, he ran a "teahouse" in Harlem where he served cannabis for smoking and cannabis yogurt-like drinks for "tea." There were over 400 such-like businesses in New York City at the time. It was not until 1937 that such marijuana "businesses" were prohibited by law. In 1930, Garvey's group ostracized Howell because of this "business" and evicted him from the building they rented to him.

Howell was deported in 1932 and returned to Jamaica. Profound movements, rightly or wrongly, develop on the waves of profound "understanding" – even if that understanding is the result of some drug-induced stupor or demonic inspiration. When Howell returned to Jamaica, he began preaching the "gospel" of "Ras Tafari as Messiah returned to earth." He began a religious movement about a Bible-inspired Black liberation through a specific code of behavior and belief that Emperor

Haile Selasse I (Ras Tafari Makonnen) was the Messiah incarnate – the Lion of Judah. [I remember that Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the former Worldwide Church of God, met with Haile Selasse during the 1970s, and they discussed how they were "kin" because both were supposedly descended from King Solomon.] Now there existed a Messiah, a "gospel," and a "spirit" on which to base the religion (read 2 Cor. 11:4).

Howell was arrested and taken to court for sedition. Defending himself against the charges, he proclaimed in his defense that: "Ras Tafari as Messiah has returned to earth ... the king of England is not my sovereign ... Emperor Haile Selasse I, King of Africa, is my sovereign."

Those in Rastafarianism have bound themselves to the same, or a similar, orthodoxy. As time has passed, those in the United States have pressed the government for recognition as a religion with all of the rights and privileges attached to their particular "Church" – especially exemption from prosecution so they can freely and openly smoke their cannabis "spliffs" (large, tapered, marijuana cigars they also call "herb" – I remember them also being called "torpedoes"). Lest you think that this is merely a silly game, this is serious religion with its own "spirit," "gospel," and "Messiah." They have both "law" and "prophet(s)" to support their cause.

The "Prophet" Bob Marley

Bob Marley is probably one of the most well-known "prophets" of modern Rastafarianism ... mainly because of his music. Many of us readily recognize such hits as "Stir It Up" and "I Shot the Sheriff." However, his followers and devotees also recognize many of his songs in which he preaches the "gospel" of Rastafarianism: "Legalize It," "Rastaman Chant" with the line "Fly away home to Zion," "Babylon System" with the line "Talk about my freedom," and many, many others (over 170 in all). He believed that Marcus Garvey was a prophet and Haile Selasse was God:

"Marcus Garvey was prophet," Bob said in an interview about his conversion. "Marcus Garvey tell everyone we must look east to the king. Everything Marcus Garvey has

said has come to pass. Everyone see it. Everything he said in that time happen today. And everyone see it happening.”

“You must understand, God is ever living and Haile Selassie is God. God is not everybody. Some people say ‘I’m a man, you’re a man’ and they look upon man and say ‘that man God’. It’s not like that. A man have to prove himself to be God, Haile Selassie is God (Ibid.).

Because of that firmly-held belief, Bob Marley embedded its spiritual message into his music either directly or indirectly ... the “acceptable” embedded in the “unacceptable.” His references to the “Father of Creation” in “One Love” are often mistaken to be references to love and togetherness among mankind. *It is the **context** in which that message is preached that must be understood.* Bob did advocate universal struggle against oppression. He did preach a message about freedom, hope, and peace for the oppressed and downtrodden. But ... it was all in the context of the Rastafarian “Messiah,” “gospel,” and “spirit.” His 170+ songs integrated many elements of the Rasta philosophy.

For example: The song “I Shot the Sheriff” was about a cannabis grower who was relentlessly pursued by a local Sheriff ... whom the cannabis grower eventually shot and killed because he was not allowed to freely grow and market his pot:

*Sheriff John Brown always hate me,
for what, I don’t know.
Every time I plant a seed,
he said, kill it before it grow.
He said, kill them before they grow
(Ibid.).*

Bob Marley unabashedly referred to cannabis as “the healing of the nations” and “the tree of life” – both expressions being biblical references to a source of “healing” and “life” that far transcends anything that cannabis can do for its consumers. He admitted that he smoked at least a pound of marijuana a week and was often photographed smoking a big spliff. What would you imagine is the message contained in songs like “Legalize It,” “Rastaman Chant,” and “Babylon System”? As the Cannabis Culture website puts it:

Bob knew well that people who smoked herb were persecuted by Babylon, the ruling system: “Them crucify Christ, remember?” Condemning cannabis was blasphemy: “You mean they can tell God that it’s not legal?” he queried a Canadian journalist – by extension that made God a criminal too, he reasoned.

His logic was centered on the concept that cannabis is a natural herb created by God. Your acceptance of Rastafari comes in proportion to your marijuana consumption. The more you consume it, the more important it becomes to you. Men create material things to get you hooked on their “market,” but God’s creation frees you from that kind of slavery. Smoking “herb” helps to open your mind so that you do not bow to the pressures of the Mother Babylon society:

“Herb make you look at yourself. You not want to bow to these things ... When the world confuse you and you’re worried, and you don’t have time to think, herb is the thing that gives you a little time for yourself, so you can live.

Bob Marley is certainly the prophet of the cannabis culture, and a prophet of Rastafari with Marcus Garvey and Leonard Howell. His funeral in May 1981, just three months after Howell’s, saw Marley buried with his guitar, soccer ball, and a fat branch of marijuana (Ibid.).

It sounds as if Robert McFerrin, Jr. might have gotten his “don’t worry; be happy” philosophy from the Prophet Bob. It is fair to ask if Bob joined forces with “Babylon” in order to produce and market his music ... the vehicle by which he cursed the existence of “Babylon” (read Rev. 18 in order to see the effects of the destruction of “Babylon”).

What Does This Teach Us?

It is almost a “pick your poison” situation when it comes down to who supplies that which addicts you and makes you its slave (see Rom.

6:16). I understand that doctors prescribe very addictive drugs in order to help their patients get through painful recoveries and back to health. I understand that most do not *intend* to become “hooked” on those drugs. When the prescription runs its course and is discontinued, the “need” does not always go away. *Prior to that point* is when one’s *integrity* has to kick in (doctor and patient) and lead the individual to a path that is right and poses no unintended consequences.

One’s *liberty*, according to Paul (whom we believe was inspired by God – see 2 Tim. 3:16), should not be used as an occasion to satisfy a demand by the “flesh.” *Integrity* (one’s unimpaired soundness of mind and heart) should recognize such a demand for what it is and not yield to it. Most would plead that the reliance upon the drug has impaired the soundness of the patient’s mind (therefore, his/her integrity) ... especially if s/he has an “addictive personality.”

Those of the true faith recognize that Paul was right when he, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reminded us that: “...God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a *sound mind*” (emphases added). Let me explain this “sound mind” to you because it plays a major part in all of our decision-making. In fact, it is the heart and core of what we might call our spiritual “defense system.” It is given by *God*, not produced by human intellect and power.

A “sound mind,” in this context, will not allow the individual to believe that “liberty” is the right to become *enslaved* to whatever carnal desire s/he has. That’s a gross contradiction of God’s *intended* consequence of setting you free through His truth (read John 8:31, 32). The Greek term from which we get the translation “sound” is *sophonismos*, which is descriptive of clear mindedness that is sound in judgment, *rectified in will*, passionate in holiness, and godly in temperament. It is a mind that is fully harmonized in all of its powers and faculties and completely regulated in the way it thinks, talks, and acts.

If you have not spent the time and holy energy to train your mind to be this way, it will not come upon you suddenly when you are faced with great, life-changing challenges. While in some cases it means “self-discipline,” in the context of Paul’s statement the “discipline” it takes to have such a

mind is far beyond anything the “self” can impose upon itself. It is this way because of the Spirit that God has made available to us through Jesus Christ. The drug culture is a carnal pursuit meant to *enslave* you to its product. The carnal mind (see Rom. 8:5-9) is not suited to defend itself very well from such a culture – or any other such culture that seeks to enslave you (pornography, alcohol, various fetishes and perversions, et cetera).

In the broad view of the problems we face from the drug lords and cartels, we have to admit that their success is mainly attributable to people who do not have such a will and, if the truth is told, no desire to have such a will. While there are some who are the unfortunates, the thrill seekers and the ones who want to “live on the edge” must share the blame for the continued existence and success of the drug lords and cartels ... and all of the misery, crime, and death that are associated with them. ***If there were no market, there would be no business.*** Even Satan would be a toothless, harmless lizard if there were none who lived by the carnal mind and provided fertile ground for their rebellion against God. (2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 12:9).

How This Can Be Fixed

Sometimes the answer to a problem is the most unlikely thing that will correct it. This answer is not in the same league as, say, “If **I** had all the power in the universe, then ...” God does have all the power in the universe, and He has offered the solution for the entirety of our problems contingent on our willingness to follow His advice and plan. Rest assured of this: He will not zap you with a magic twanger or cover you with spoofum dust either with or without your consent. This is the most unlikely thing to offer humankind because humankind is not prone to follow God’s advice and solution (Rom. 1:28). As a matter of fact, most would say that His solution is too simplistic and unworkable in today’s world.

The Beatles and others sang the Hippie theme song “back in the day” that claimed that “*love* is all we need” and “*love* is the answer.” The only problem with that message is that it had to be translated into Hippie-speak. It was akin to a libertarian-type of life-style: Give me enough room

to “do my thing” and do not judge me harshly about my personal choices: free love, “Mary Jane,” LSD, mushrooms, the way I dress, the length of my hair, the music to which I listen, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. “Love” in that vocabulary had little resemblance to the “love” that God sponsors. It amounted to an individualistic lifestyle of sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll. The only change over the succeeding years has been the style of music involved.

What is the kind of “love” that God requires? Matthew 22:34-40 provides Jesus’ insight: (1) love God supremely and (2) love your neighbor just like you would love yourself. If you want an expansion of that insight, simply refer to Exodus 20:1-17. There are four commandments about loving God supremely and six about loving your neighbor just like you would love yourself.

The Greek term that is translated into English as *hang* (v. 40 KJV) is about the same as the English term *hinges* in that the Law and the Prophets *depend* on these two great laws of God for success. This was Jesus’ way of saying that the Law and the Prophets *rely* on these two great commandments for support and aid. These are the two legal bases on which God created His plan to create humankind in His image (Genesis 1:26-28; John 3:16-19).

God loves humankind as much as He loves Himself in order to commit Himself to such an unselfish plan to bring humankind to the great potential He plans for them. But ... Ephesians 1:4 says that His expectation and will are that human-

kind will be holy, blameless, and loving. If, by personal choice, you do not agree with God to love Him supremely and your fellow man like you do yourself, then you cannot expect anything but the social and sexual chaos that destroys our world through your *self-righteousness* (see Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 8:5-9).

Read Romans 13:8-10 to see that God’s definition of “love” *works no ill* and *does no harm* (see Isa. 65:17-25 and 1 John 3:7-12). That cannot be said about the drug and criminal culture – whether you are a supplier or a consumer. If you are involved on either end, then you are a participant in the *sin* that is involved. You have an independent mind and make the choices that either get you into the “ditch” or out of it. *You* control a much larger part of the problem than you give yourself credit for controlling. Choosing to go God’s way (see 1 John 5:15-17) instead of the way of the world is paramount in your efforts to be really free (John 8:31, 32).

God does not pretend that it is easy to fight against the carnal mind, but He does have confidence in the success you can have when you fight the good fight of true faith and true, godly love (Rom. 8:28, 31-39). If we all could do that as a holy, blameless, loving, unified front against the carnal mind, the drug lords themselves would leave their cartels to rot in the dust of time because they would have no customers to enslave. They, too, might very well discover God’s salvation and embrace it. How much crime and violence would disappear from the face of the earth?

The Problem: “Don’t you know that you are the servant of the one to whom you subject yourself?” (Romans 6:16)

The Solution: “...Serve God rather than man.” (Acts 5:29)

POLITICAL TIDBITS

I think that political candidates are rather funny at times when they present their political causes to the public. Some of the expressions they use, their duplicitous answers, and the rhetoric are more fit for a competition among amateur stand-up comedians than they are for the political stage. I would like to share a few of these political tidbits with you, if for no other reason, to brighten up your day and cause you to think about what you are being “fed” during this election cycle.

1. Part of an anti-Trump movement claims that he has had several bankruptcies and bad business deals. The accuser points out that Mr. Trump defaulted on an airline he started. In fact, Mr. Trump sold the airline and made money on the deal. And ... the “failed” businesses Trump supposedly suffered are alive and doing well. The same kind of charges were used against the accuser in his own previous bid for the Presidency. Go figure!

2. Have you noticed that the politicians claim to respect one another and to enjoy some level of friendship ... their lambasts and accusations toward one another’s moral turpitude is merely *political*, not *personal*? How does that work?

3. One candidate says that he is the only one who has beaten the frontrunner – and can beat him – in the presidential race because he has beaten him six times. However, the frontrunner has beaten him more than 15 times. How does that math work?

4. “I’m the only one who can beat the frontrunner in my state.” Yet, there are three that are running against the frontrunner in the same state. It seems that the frontrunner, if he is really beaten, will be beaten by the three because two others also take votes away from the frontrunner. What if the frontrunner comes in last and this candidate comes in third? Is that a shallow victory? Does this candidate allow for the fact that the frontrunner can win all the delegates in a “take all” state with just one more vote than this candidate gets? His own victory can be a mere one vote margin. That’s the way “winner takes all” works.

5. Who really gets anything “free” from the government? If the rich get tired of being taxed beyond reason and move to another country, what will the lower classes do about the “free” stuff? Why didn’t the Obama bailouts redistribute the multiple billions of dollars to the citizens instead of to the corporations and financial groups?

The “Diseased” Brain

(How Addiction Hijacks the Brain)

It is understandable that each person is an individual with an independent mind and body. Each is unique in many respects, but greatly similar in many others. One interesting assertion from the website www.sciencenews.org is this: “Each addicted brain is *different*, depending on the drug of abuse, genetics, activity and more. Addiction is a difficult and highly *individualistic* disease that shows just how much our brains can change” (emphases added). In order to understand the anatomy of addiction and how addiction *hijacks* the brain, we must understand how the brain works and how the hijacking takes place.

The purpose of this article is to give a broad overview of the anatomy of addiction. I cannot cover the immense amount of information involved in such a narrow format. But ... I can open a door of understanding that you can use relative to God’s revelation so that you can understand how to avoid being caught in the trap of addiction – whatever that addiction might potentially be. I can provide you a sense of direction for dealing with any addiction with which you are presently having difficulty. Your situation is not impossible *if you are willing to follow faithfully the revelation God provides in His word.*

How the Brain Works

This discussion will not be detailed – it is the “Cliff Notes” approach to generally acquaint you with how the brain works. If you understand this general, basic discussion well enough, perhaps you can scaffold it to other things that you might know about the mind and memory.

Anciently, when Elihu spoke of there being a “spirit” in man that “constrains” (that is, places limits upon) him, he was speaking of the *brain* and its capacity to imbue humans with mind-power (Job 32:8, 18 KJV). It is difficult to say exactly what the full understanding of the brain was in Elihu’s day, but ... we can be sure that he recognized that his thoughts and ways were somehow controlled and defined by this “spirit” in him. We can understand that he felt that he was *limited* to one degree or another in what that “spirit” was ultimately able to understand and drive his body’s action to perform. In fact, the word *constrain* also carries with it a meaning that the brain actually *compels* humans to think and reason and plan despite their abilities to ultimately bring all of that to fruition (see James 4:13-15).

Another ancient, the prophet Jeremiah, made another admission that is pertinent to this discussion about how the human brain works. Jeremiah said that the *ultimate course* of man’s life is not in his complete control – leaving the impression that some *outside* force must be introduced in order to control man’s path of life to get him where he has the potential to ultimately be (Jer. 10:23, 24). He later quotes the Lord God as saying that the very core of this “spirit” in man (that is, the “heart”) is deceitful and can take an individual far afield from his objectives in life, which means that the man’s “heart” has to be thoroughly inspected and tested by God in order for God to understand him and reward him accordingly (17:9, 10).

Proverbs 14:12 matter-of-factly asserts that the human brain can be deceived by things that appear to be right and good; yet ... they lead the human to his own death. Of all of the great revelations in the Bible about the brain, I think that Ecclesiastes 1:8 reveals something astounding: The capacity of the brain to process all that we see, hear, feel, smell, and taste is *limitless*. Modern scientists agree with that assessment by King Solomon.

Educator Dr. David Sousa puts it this way:

“The brain works *ceaselessly*, even when we are asleep. Although it represents only about 2 percent of our body weight, it consumes nearly 20 percent of our calories” (*How the Brain Learns* 1995; Reston, VA: The National Association of Secondary School Principals; p. 1; emphases added).

There is never a time during our lives when our brains are not processing all of the information provided by our five senses. The “spirit” (mind-power) in man cogitates voluntarily or involuntarily to make sense of it. At all times there is also an *autonomic system* that is providing impulses that operate every facet of the human body in its attempts to keep the body and mind properly regulated and maintained and repaired. Nothing, it seems, ever fills the brain to capacity ... but it can become “diseased” in one way or another.

For the general purpose of this subtopic, let’s consider the general functions of three main parts of the brain: *cerebrum*, *cerebellum*, and *brain stem*. I do this to distinguish how the functions of the brain are divided in order to keep the body systems functioning properly. I want you to picture these areas in your mind so that you can understand what is going on during these functions. I will paraphrase Dr. Sousa’s book as I present this information to you. Know this: Dr. Sousa is not the only source from which such information is available.

Cerebrum

The *cerebrum* is the largest of the three areas of the brain. It represents about 80% of the total weight of the brain and is divided into what is generally called “left brain” and “right brain.” These hemispheres operate the sides of the body *opposite* to their cranial locations. There is a thick cable of over 250 million nerve fibers (the *corpus callosum*) that control the coordination of and communication between the two sides of the cerebrum.

The surface of the cerebrum (about one tenth of an inch thick) is called the *cortex* and is composed of “six layers of cells meshed in about *10,000 miles* of connecting fibers *per cubic inch!*” (Ibid; p. 2; emphases added). Just think of how

microscopic these fibers are! David did not know this information when he exclaimed in Psalm 139:14: “...I am fearfully and wonderfully made....”

The cerebrum controls thinking, memory, speech, and muscular movement. Deeply embedded in the cerebrum is the *limbic system* (which we will discuss later), which is located between the cerebrum and the brain stem. It is involved in the emotional responses and permits the interplay between emotion and reason.

The *hippocampus*, located at the base of the brain, consolidates *learning* by converting information from the working memory (information not yet stored into long-term memory) into electrical signals in order for it to be stored in the long-term memory. It runs a type of analysis of information brought into the working memory and compares it to the stored memory. It assists with attaching *meaning* to our informational experiences. If this part of the brain is injured, the brain will only have short-term memory. Senile dementia and Alzheimer’s apparently damage the hippocampus.

At the end of the hippocampus is an almond-shaped area called the *amygdala*, which is also a part of the limbic system. It plays an important role in emotions. If it is removed, a raving maniac will become a docile individual. The amygdala assists in the emotional attachment of information transferred from working memory to long-term storage. Anytime a memory is recalled, the emotion involved will also be attached to it. Such memories are important in cognitive learning (learning concerned with acquiring problem-solving skills, intelligence, and conscious thought – changing behavior based on information gained from one’s environment).

Cerebellum

The *cerebellum* is called “the little brain.” It is located just below the rear part of the cerebrum. Its basic function is to coordinate every movement of the body by monitoring nerve ending impulses in the muscles. If the cerebellum is damaged, then the individual will not be able to coordinate movements like catching a ball, pouring coffee, or shaking someone’s hand. Think of the wounded warriors who return to us from the battlefield or the

sports figures who endure physical damage during competitions. The concern about concussions and repeated blows to the head is certainly warranted when we understand the functions of the human brain. The cerebellum initiates nothing on its own, but it controls all body movements by coordinating them and modifying them as needed.

Brain Stem

There are 12 body nerves that go to the brain – 11 of them end in the *brain stem* (the olfactory nerve goes directly to the cerebrum). The brain stem is the center of sensory reception and the monitor and controller of vital body functions like heartbeat, respiration, body temperature, and digestion. It also houses the *reticular activating system*, which is also known as the *perceptual register*.

The RAS monitors the strength and nature of all sensory impulses experienced by the body. In less than a second, it determines the degree of importance that sensory input has and blocks those that are unimportant so that they drop out of the processing system ... enabling the individual to ignore them from that point on. Think of focusing your attention on reading while someone is chatting on the phone. If the chatting is considered unimportant, then you will eventually not even hear it.

So, the RAS is a *perceptual filter*. If this sensory filter is unable to operate properly because of damage or impairment, the brain can get to the point where it blocks all of the sensory input. The individual will appear more and more detached from the world around him/her.

What is the “take-away” in this discussion? Humans have one of the most sophisticated “computers” in all of creation because we are, indeed, “fearfully and wonderfully made.” We are going to learn how the *limbic reward system* gets “hijacked” by our addictions because it links systems of the brain that control and regulate emotions (like the pleasure of eating, drinking, sex), memory systems, and motivational systems. The “hijacking” impairs systems that would normally inhibit the hijacking and the stimulation to continue the abuses and addictions.

We are going to understand more fully why God tells us not to allow our *liberty* to become an occasion to wrap ourselves in the pursuits of the “flesh” (see again Rom. 8:5-9). We are going to understand more fully why He warns us about the *lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life* (see 1 John 2:15-17). You cannot ... **will not** ... achieve the great potential that God has in store for you by falling prey to carnal abuses and addictions. Note especially the last part of 1 John 5:17: “...he that does the will of God **abides forever.**” That cannot happen if you submit yourself to slavery to the “flesh.” God provides those who are obedient a spiritual element that counteracts the “hijacking” (see 2 Tim. 1:7).

How the Brain Learns

Our environment can actually overload our perceptual registry (our sensory filter). However, the brain is designed to deal with that through two *temporary memories* (short-term and working) and a *permanent, long-term memory*. All of this makes it possible for the brain to deal with a constant flow of sensory stimuli – much of which is actually subconsciously processed ... if only for less than a second. Even during sleep, the five senses collect an average of 40,000 bits of information per second (the average over the course of a day) from every part of the body! The perceptual register prevents us from “blowing” our minds. If it does not, then we will suffer what is called a “nervous breakdown” – a period of mental illness resulting from severe depression, stress, or anxiety (also called mental collapse, breakdown, crisis, and trauma).

Here is how the brain learns. Whatever the perceptual register initially “weeds out” of the sensory input is put into the “trash bin” (think of your computer’s “recycle bin”). Whatever it allows through will go into the *short-term memory*. This “memory” is an extension of the perceptual register, but the duration of the input’s effect depends on the relative significance attached to it. For example, you will pay attention to an emergency siren as long as it signals some importance to you. As it fades in the distance and that importance decreases, the auditory data will be blocked and dropped ... “trashed,” so to speak.

After this stage, another “sifting” takes place whereby some of the remainder of the data will be sent to the “trash bin,” and the rest will be transferred to the working memory (think of your computer’s “clipboard”). In this “clipboard” situation, the information will remain as long as it is needed ... but it is not permanent. Think of how you would “cram” for a test in school. You memorized lots of information in order to be able to pass the test, but over the long-haul, you really cared very little about the information because you were not interested in the subject matter beyond its being required for graduation. When that memory had accomplished its purpose, it was dropped and discarded. Now you do not remember it because it was not “learned” for any permanent purpose. This “working” memory is a conscious process rather than a subconscious process.

Think of this “working” memory as a situation in which you can *construct, destruct, examine,* and/or *rework* ideas that are important to you on various levels. You will do this with the intention of making this memory permanent because it demands your attention and you focus on it with varying degrees of interest. Since this “memory” function can handle only a limited number of things at a time, it is not quick to block and drop the total number of memories involved. You might remember a time when you have said: “I finally understand...” That is because your “working memory” has continued to deal with the related information input until it makes sense to you.

The “working” memory can increase in capacity as your experiences in life increase. Be aware, though, that data is processed in a hierarchy: first: that which affects survival; second: that which affects emotions; and third, that that which affects learning. With that in mind, be aware that there is still a chance that some of the data input will end up in the “trash bin” and be forgotten. What happens to the rest of it?

Once “meaning” has been attached to something, it will be put into the long-term memory. Information in the “long-term memory” can be retrieved as need, placed on the “work table” of the working memory and updated, upgraded, revised, and/or attached to other information (old or new) to increase your store of knowledge. This “long-term memory” is your *cognitive belief sys-*

tem ... what makes up your unique belief paradigm (how you interpret the world based on your experiences). This, essentially, makes up what you have “learned.” It includes both *voluntary* and *involuntary* “learning” experiences.

Again, what is the “take-away” here? There is more to the “learning” experience than putting into your mind all of the important “stuff.” The “stuff” that is remembered is the “stuff” that has made a significant impression upon your brain during the processing of all of the information that comes in from your environment(s). The “learning” process is not merely “important” information. It can be something silly and infantile that made a profound impression on your brain to the point that you do not forget it ... and you might pull it out of the long-term storage from time-to-time to use it for a more serious purpose. I still remember silly stuff from Ernie Kovacs, Pinky Lee, and Uncle Johnny Koons, whom I watched on Saturday mornings during the early 1950s when I was a pre-teen. At that time, they were riotously funny! Not so much now (1 Cor. 13:11).

Involved in this process is about a trillion nerve cells (neurons) and glial cells that compose the brain. The glial cells hold together the nerve cells and prevent harmful substances from harming them. Each neuron cell body has about six tree-like branches (called dendrites) extending from it and is connected to other neuron cells by a long fiber called an axon. The dendrites receive electrical impulses from other neurons and transmit them (250 to 2,500 per second) to other neurons via the axon. The synapse is a space of about one millionth of an inch that is between each axon and neuron cell. When a signal is transmitted from neuron to neuron, chemicals called neurotransmitters are released to excite or inhibit the neighboring neuron. There are over 50 known neurotransmitters. Learning occurs when the synapses are changed so that the influence of one neuron on another also changes.

All of this information is given to assist you in understanding our next discussion about how addictions “hijack” your brain and cause you to fall prey to an insidious “virus” that diseases it ... that causes it to be put on a path to destruction if there is no meaningful interdiction to restrain or destroy the “hijacking” agent.

The Limbic System

The *limbic system* is necessary for survival. Why? Remember what I said above about it being deeply embedded in the *cerebrum* where the right and left sides of the brain are controlled and interfaced: thinking, memory, speech, and muscle movement. It controls the interplay between the cerebrum and the brain stem. Inside that limbic system lies the *amygdala* (attached to the *hippocampus*), which encodes emotional messages when learning is transferred from the working memory to long-term storage. The limbic system is part of the *reward system* of the brain. It is the place of all manner of emotions and pleasures.

Bethany Brookshire writes the following about one particular neurotransmitter, called *dopamine*, that has an extraordinary effect on the limbic system:

In a brain that people love to describe as “awash with chemicals,” one chemical always stands out. Dopamine: the molecule behind all our most sinful behaviors and secret cravings. Dopamine is love. Dopamine is lust. Dopamine is adultery. Dopamine is motivation. Dopamine is attention. Dopamine is feminism. Dopamine is addiction.

... The reality is dopamine has something to do with all of these. But it *is* none of them. Dopamine is a chemical in your body. That’s all.

(http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/07/what_is_dopamine_love_lust_sex_addiction_gambling_motivation_reward.html; emphases by original author)

I must point out that dopamine affects much more than what is stated above. Ms. Brookshire is stating fact, but incomplete fact ... which she admits. And, she demonstrates very well that dopamine plays a critical role in many brain functions – some good; some bad. It depends on what it is “tied” to. Its basic function is to act as one of 50 or

so *chemical signals* that pass information from one neuron to another.

When you consider the number of neuron cells in the adult brain (about ten billion – about 10 times the number of stars in the Milky Way: Sousa, p. 5), then you can well understand how busy dopamine is. Also consider that the number of synapse pathways among the neurons is estimated to be over 100 times the number of total atoms in the universe (Ibid.). All that is contained in three pounds of soft tissue called the brain!

One of the many functions of dopamine is to *predict reward*. One of the verses and the chorus in Carly Simon’s song “Anticipation” gives us a sample of this idea:

And I tell you how easy it feels to be with you ... and how right your arms feel around me. But I, I rehearsed those lines just late last night when I was thinking about how right tonight might be.

Anticipation, anticipation
Is makin’ me late
Is keepin’ me waiting.

That is a sample of how dopamine works to “tickle” your brain in anticipation of the “reward” that is waiting for you.

The dopamine pathway is called the **mesolimbic pathway** ... which helps to drive such things as motivation, attention, lust, and addiction. If dopamine is released into the *nucleus accumbens*, it is in response to things like sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll (Brookshire). If you begin to fantasize about something in anticipation of the “reward” involved, or when you are hyper-vigilant or paranoid, then dopamine will be released. There are numerous things that can cue the release of dopamine.

I want you to pay attention to what follows so you can understand how this “hijacks” your brain in the addiction to something. This is a simplistic explanation of a very complex process that is contingent on the area of the brain affected. Dopamine plays so many roles in so many parts of the brain that it is unrealistic to associate it primarily with addiction. Understand clearly Brookshire’s caveat in the following statement:

...[D]opamine has to do with addiction, whether to cupcakes or cocaine. It has to do with lust and love. It has to do with milk. It has to do with movement, motivation, attention, psychosis. Dopamine plays a part in all of these. But it *is* none of them, and we shouldn't want it to be. Its complexity is what makes it great. It shows us what, with a single molecule, the brain can do.

Now we can move to the main point of this discussion: How drugs and other addictions “hijack” the brain. You can find more information about this at the following website:

<http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/01/11/462390288/anatomy-of-addiction-how-heroin-and-opioids-hijack-the-brain>.

The following paraphrase is important:

- Opioids increase the amount of dopamine in the limbic reward system.
- Dopamine causes intense feelings of pleasure, which drives users to seek out the drug again and again.
- All drugs that people use to get high “tickle” this part of the brain.
- The limbic reward system hijack[s] other systems of [the] brain – systems that drive judgment, planning and organization – driving the user to seek that pleasure of getting high. That process can go on during [many] years of sobriety.
- Treatment for opioid addiction includes a variety of services: medication, talk therapy, job support, all stretched out over years. *Detox is not enough*. The relapse rate for detox only is above 90 percent.

Let's do a final sifting of information before I draw some conclusions. I offer the following paraphrase of information from the website:

www.sciencenews.org/blog/scicurious/addiction-showcases-brain-flexibility:

Whether it is a *disorder of reward* or a *disorder of learning*, it makes the brain develop irresistible responses to the source of the addictive cue ... the smell of a cigarette, the sight of a whiskey bottle, the scent of a familiar perfume and the fond memories attached to it. Somewhere in all of the clutter of life, many other things become unimportant next to the addictive cue ... even love, money, God....

Even after years of recovery and sobriety, one bad experience during an otherwise delightful day can pull the trigger and release the hell-hounds of the addiction. Brad Paisley and Alison Kraus capture that image perfectly in their duet “Whiskey Lullaby,” written by Bill Anderson and Jon Randall: “He put that bottle to his head and pulled the trigger.”

Sciencenews.org offers this:

“A lot of people think addiction is what happens when someone finds a drug to be the most rewarding thing they've ever experienced,” says neuroscientist George Koob, director of the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) in Bethesda, Md. “But drug abuse is not just feeling good about drugs. ***Your brain is changed when you misuse drugs. It is changed in ways that perpetuate the problem.***” The changes associated with drug use affect how addicts respond to drug cues, like the smell of a cigarette or the sight of a shot of vodka. Drug abuse also changes how other rewards, such as money or food are processed, ***decreasing their relative value*** (emphases added).

For what it is worth, I believe that *fantasizing* about something is just as strong a cue as an actual picture or smell (see Matt. 5:27, 28). The first *desire* to experience something can be just as strong as the memory of having experienced it.

This, in essence, is how one very easily enslaves him/herself to something that causes his/her brain to be hijacked and become virtually unmanageable. Think of the most insidious virus that can attack and take control of your computer. In point-

of-fact, there is very little difference between that and an addiction. According to Paul Kenny, a neurobiologist at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai in New York City, *all addictive drugs increase dopamine* (sciencenews.org).

This is dangerous because:

- Dopamine is not really a measure of pleasure; it might be a measure of *value* ... even though scientists do not know from where pleasure and value come.
- As someone takes a drug over and over, dopamine and other systems in the brain adapt to the presence of the drug.
- Receptors that control the response to chemicals change one's concentration.
- Connections between brain cells and between different areas of the brain strengthen and weaken.
- The *birth* of new neurons *decreases*.
- The more you do it, the more it becomes ingrained and permanent.
- The critical difference may lie in the ease with which a memory or cue is translated into action.
- There is a difference between a pleasant memory and a powerful, overwhelming craving.
- *Genetics* make some people more prone to addictions than others. The environments in which they live and the stresses associated with them also contribute (Ibid.).

Rita Goldstein, an addiction neuroimaging researcher at Mount Sinai notes that:

[A]ddicts have some reliable and replicable *decreases* in gray matter in brain regions *important to learning and reward processes*. Some deficits in decision-making and emotional self-awareness are present even when there are no drugs available. The only over-all explanation for addiction is that the brain is adapting to its environment. This plasticity takes place on many levels and impacts many behaviors, whether it is learning, reward

or emotional processing (Ibid; emphases added).

What can we do to avoid such slavery? What does God reveal to us in His word that can help assure us of a *sound mind*?

God's Revealed Remedy

There are numerous pieces of information in the Bible that give us instruction about coming out of slavery to our carnal desires – instruction that, if followed carefully, can prevent our brains from being hijacked and becoming “diseased.” What I am about to show you might seem a bit simplistic, but rest assured that the value of the information is immense if you employ it as part of a deep repentance and determination to overcome whatever holds you captive – drugs, booze, sex, smokes, sugar, food, et cetera ad nauseum.

Knowledge

Get to know your “enemy” and how it operates. If you know how it operates, then you can know how you might make yourself most vulnerable to it. Understanding that provides a way out of the folly and danger (see 1 Cor. 10:13). For instance, God's first law to newly created mankind had to do with mixing “good” knowledge with “evil” knowledge (see Gen. 2:15-17). Why is that important? The “evil” knowledge is deceitful because it will give you a sense of an *invulnerability* that you do not naturally have. It skews your senses. Do not play that game (Gen. 3:1-7).

Read Solomon's confession in Ecclesiastes 1:12-18. He literally dedicated his life to gaining wisdom and understanding about *everything* done under the sun among mankind ... “good” and “evil” (v. 13). He became very rich, very wise, and very knowledgeable (vv. 16-17). Because his knowledge ultimately was so thoroughly mixed with “evil,” he could only draw one conclusion: it brought him much grief and sorrow (v. 18). It was of no ultimate, *eternal* benefit or value to him.

Isaiah 55:8-11 is a comparison between God's thoughts and ways and mankind's. James 4:13-17 is a description of how mankind's thoughts and ways fall far short of God's. Read Proverbs 3 and note the benefits of walking in the wisdom and knowledge of God rather than in the paths of your own understanding and wisdom. Add to your knowledge the fact that there are things that are very deceitful and lead to death (Prov. 14:12), but the knowledge and wisdom of God provides a refuge in the "storms" of life (v. 27).

Repentance

One of the great options that God has given to mankind is that of repentance. God realizes that our human condition is going to lead us astray from His thoughts and ways. Repentance means that you are willing to change directions because you are willing to admit the wrong-headed direction of your own thoughts and ways and wish to follow a path to be free from the consequences. Paul covers this in Romans 12:1, 2 and 1 Corinthians 11:28, 29.

Romans 12:1, 2 demonstrates that a change of mind and purpose needs to take place – a change for which you will sacrifice your life. How so? It must consist of three things: (1) forsaking your conformity to the "world"; (2) changing the way you think and act; and (3) "proving" that God's will is the supreme objective in your life by living by His thoughts and ways (see Acts 2:37-39).

First Corinthians 11:28, 29 demonstrates that we must be introspective: that is, we must be deliberate about examining how we are thinking and acting in order to identify the things that need to be changed in our lives for the better. Based on that self-examination, we then begin to change our thoughts and ways to be in harmony with God's will. We will allow ourselves to be corrected according to God's knowledge and wisdom. We will allow ourselves to be taught God's righteousness and give up our own self-righteousness. We will become intensely aware of the caveat in v. 29: If we are not serious about the change that needs to

be made, we could be facing our own destruction at the hands of a holy God (see Heb. 10:26-31).

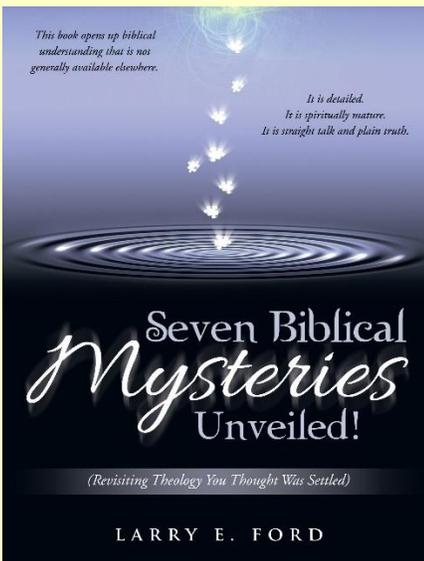
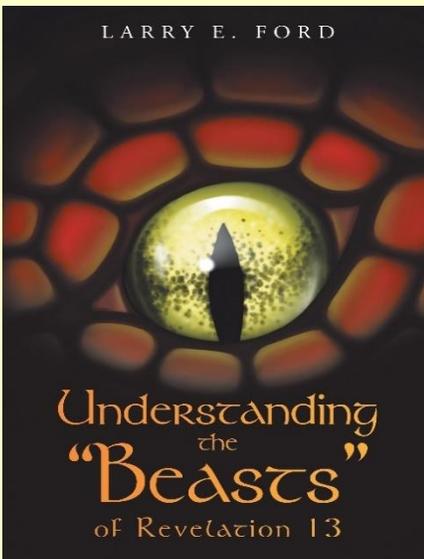
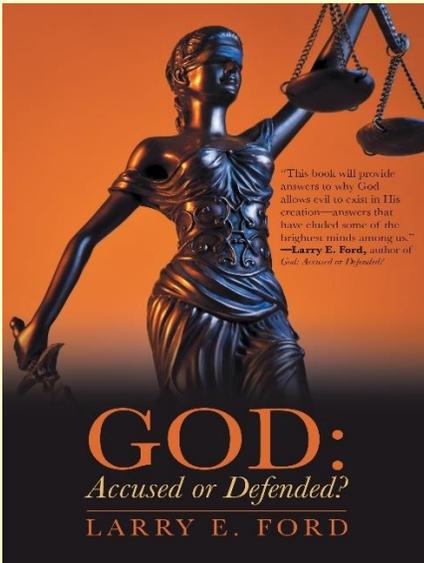
How much are you willing change your mind about? When will you allow yourself to be taught a better way? To what degree will you submit yourself to deliberate, purposeful self-examination so that you can say once and for all "I will no longer be a slave to [whatever enslaves you]?" Contrary to popular belief, you do not have to wait until you hit rock bottom! The sooner you start the process the sooner you can be delivered from that slavery. Rock bottom could be the point at which you are destroyed beyond repair.

Commitment

In one sense of the word, I am talking about pledging yourself to a specific plan of action. In another sense of the word, I am talking about entrusting life and limb to a higher power for deliverance, safekeeping, and protection ... putting yourself under the custody of that higher power. Let me demonstrate what I mean by this.

In Psalm 31, David writes of putting his complete trust in the Lord God to deliver him according to His own righteousness. Read the entire psalm to understand that bit of information. As you read, be impressed by v. 5: "Into your hand I commit my spirit." David is speaking of entrusting his mind and "heart" to God's care and protection. Note also how David pledges to depend upon God's righteousness as his guiding principle in life.

Now read Psalm 37. Note such words as "fret not," "trust," "delight," "rest," and "wait." One of the most significant statements David makes is this: "Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring [your deliverance] to pass" (v. 5). Proverbs 16:3 encourages us to "Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts shall be established" (Hebrew = "firmly fixed; stable") – made to be disciplined, sound, and under control. There is no good reason why anyone should be destroyed forever. God does not will any such thing (John 3:16-19; 2 Pet. 3:9).



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