

Microsoft Word Review Edits

OUR BATTLESCARRED BIBLE

Without the Bible, we Christians would have absolutely no earthly witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Christ, our Lord and Savior in whom our faith is grounded and on whom our souls depend. It is helpful to remember that the Bible weathered storms in the past and, strong as ever, stands loved and respected, shining divine light on the Christian's path, yesterday, today and forever!

Aside from inter-religious conflicts, there are two major internal sources of attacks on the Bible: (1) the advances in science and (2) the ongoing American civic revolution. There are direct attacks, but many arise incidentally and even accidentally; even arising from the work of sincere Christians.

Probably, the first major attack resulted from the revolutionary discovery of the astronomer, Galileo (1564-1642) that the earth is not the center of the cosmos, not even of our solar system. That claim challenged the biblical understanding view of Man and Earth as centralities in God's creation. Catholic and Protestant church leaders attacked Galileo as a heretic. Today, no one seriously debates the truth of his discovery; astronomy belittles Man's claim to cosmic centrality. The Bible hasn't changed, but the scope of our minds has. We cherish and embrace both scientific discovery and Biblical truth and make allowance for understandable world views of ages past.

In colonial New England (and much more so in Europe) witch-burning was practiced in obedience to the Scriptures for a short time. The horror of the practice was so abhorrent to the Spirit of Christ in Christian hearts that the practice stopped; today the commandment to kill witches is ignored and "witch-hunt" refers to hateful bigotry. It may have been needed to counter the influence of pagan belief and practice in the days when it was written, but not today. The Holy Spirit lets the Church allow a witch to live but continue to use the Bible to light its way.

Within a few centuries, a greater incidental threat to Christian faith arose from archeological discoveries. Dinosaur bones were being discovered in increasing numbers and varieties; there was no accounting for such creatures in the Bible. Then, Charles Darwin theorized an evolutionary process of evolution requiring millions of years. It was a credible explanation of how Nature developed the expanding varieties of life forms that have existed on earth. The theory was seen to challenge the Biblical account of the Creation. This battle for the Bible soon embroiled educational systems, public and private, at almost every level. Churches, homes and elementary schools that shunned this shocking scientific theory too often found that when their inadequately informed young people entered colleges and universities, the scientific culture shock destroyed their Christian faith. A shrinking but significant number of Christians vigorously defend the literal Biblical account and denounce the theory of relativity, but the majority seem to have accommodated both "truths", scientific and Biblical with appreciation for both.

Another contest arose from differing interpretations, both of the Bible and of the Declaration of Independence. Are all men truly created equal? Is slavery acceptable to God? The fore-score year debate ended tragically; by brute force and in oceans of blood. Six

Comment [M1]: Suggest using larger sized and contrasting font to emphasis instead of all capital letters. Traditional location for title is center-aligned.

Comment [M2]: No comma necessary.

Comment [M3]: Incorrect comma placement: between "past, and".

Comment [M4]: Delete commas before and after this phrase.

Comment [M5]: Suggest slight rephrasing to "incidentally and even accidentally:."

Comment [M6]: Delete – redundant.

Comment [M7]: Add emphasis with "in fact," before "astronomy" and close one space after it.

Comment [M8]: Lower case "s", not a proper noun here.

Comment [M9]: Close one space here.

Comment [M10]: Consider adding "an act" for clarity.

Comment [M11]: Delete comma.

Comment [M12]: Add comma or em dashes for emphasis. And like the word "scripture" the adjective "biblical" is not capitalized.

Comment [M13]: Close one space before and after semicolon.

hundred thousand Americans, mostly Christians, killed opposing brothers, thus belying Jesus' teaching that the world would recognize his disciples by their love for one another. The Bible was sorely tested, but its verity emerged. "His truth is marching on. Glory! Hallelujah!" Christians, today, no longer debate slavery.

As modern science increasingly generated biblical conflict, some biblical scholars concluded that they could use science's critical tools to better understand and defend the Bible. Archaeology, geology, astronomy, literary analysis, cultural studies, etc. all provided the means to developed new (and frequently controversial) theories about the source(s), dates, historical setting, authorship, intent, interrelationships and verifiability of each of the Bible's books. These ongoing, proliferating studies provide fertile ground for speculation and debate, yielding varieties of fruit; such as hope, light, distrust and dismay. They also result in numerous new, contemporary translations, much to the confusion of believers, some of whom choose to remain in the comforting cadences of the old, familiar King James Version of 1611. Regardless, modern scholarship enriched our understanding of the Bible. It remains a hope and stay an anchor for the Church.

It is interesting to observe that, for the most part, American Christians perceive civil law as being compatible with Biblical concerns, often even defining them. "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..." is increasingly broadened in scope. Some Christians may initiate and spearhead the cause but Christians in general tend to resist the changes until they are enacted into law. Then they generally become accepted. "blue collar" workers, women, Blacks, prisoners, aliens, and children have come into the fold, sometimes seeking full realization of their rights. We then concur that the Bible implicitly endorses them, too.

It is somewhat disturbing to contemplate the following. Some practices, previously condemned as manifestly un-Biblical and illegal, once legalized, quietly became accepted and embraced by Christians in general. Some examples can be cited.

Alternative suggestion: it is somewhat disturbing to contemplate the following trend: legalization of practices that were formerly condemned as manifestly unbiblical and illegal often means they become quietly accepted and embraced by Christians in general. Three such examples can be cited.

First, state or local laws, known as "Blue Laws" forbade such things as working on Sunday, the Lord's Day, except for necessary employment in hospitals, etc. The Biblical command, "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy" was vigorously preached and practiced in America. But, when Blue Laws were overturned by the courts, Christians generally narrowed their observation of the Lord's Day as Sabbath Rest to casual attendance at Sunday morning worship service, feeling free to use the rest of the day as they pleased, even including gainful employment when circumstances were favorable. Thus, was a Commandment reduce to lip service.

Another instructive example requires attention. In the 19th and early 20th century, "demon rum" was a major Christian concern and resulted in the legalization and subsequent de-legalization of Prohibition. That movement lost its fire and denominations no longer emphasize it in sermon or group. Nevertheless, the abuse of alcohol and other addictive drugs remains a major source of criminal behavior, notably in college towns.

Comment [M14]: Close one space before period.

Comment [M15]: No commas necessary here.

Comment [M16]: Add comma after opening phrase.

Comment [M17]: Delete "ed", not past tense.

Comment [M18]: Use comma and close one space after it.

Comment [M19]: Delete comma.

Comment [M20]: Add comma for clarity.

Comment [M21]: Lower case "b" for adjective.

Comment [M22]: Ellipses are formed by adding one space between each of three periods. Also, no comma necessary.

Comment [M23]: Delete quotation marks and capitalize "Blue". Use lower case "b" for "blacks" though.

Comment [M24]: Delete comma.

Comment [M25]: Consider rephrasing to increase clarity.

Comment [M26]: No comma needed, although it could be used if one is included after "laws,"

Comment [M27]: Delete comma after "thus", use lower case "c" for "commandment" and close space after it. Also, add "d" to "reduce".

Comment [M28]: Consider deleting this sentence and prefacing the following sentence with "Secondly,"

Consider also that in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus preached that remarriage after divorce was sinful, (Matthew alone provides a vague exception). Initially and generally, state laws conformed to the Scriptures on this subject, as did churches. But in the twentieth century, laws relaxed in response to public pressure. In large part, without protest, churches adapted to the laws and muted their denunciation of divorce. The Roman Catholic Church maintains its anti-divorce stance but appears to circumvent it superficially with generous annulments, which embarrassingly makes previous unions sinful and bastardizes the children. Whatever God's will, divorce no longer carries the stigma it bore for nineteen hundred years.

Now we engaged in a great debate as to whether practicing gays are eligible for full fellowship in our church. One important consideration is whether individuals have chosen the gay life or whether their sexual attraction toward members of their same gender is inherent (God-given). It is my observation that, in our church, every family that has come forward to share their burden of a gay family member, affirmed that the gay life style had not been chosen, but discovered after puberty to be inherent. They accept their gay member with tolerant compassion. Out of their pain they protest, "Why would anyone could choose to be gay?" So perhaps we can consider only inherency for now.

The other aspect is that of the consistently condemnatory witness of the Bible. We have considered many historical instances when the Bible was challenged and subsequently our understanding of its meaning was modified to suit enlightened understanding and, where appropriate, satisfy compassion for brothers and sisters (our neighbors).

One of my favorite hymns sings, "New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth; they must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth."¹ The Bible speaks to people in every age. As it spoke to people in ages past, it speaks to us today, and may require us to hear Jesus anew. He sent his Holy Spirit to help his followers find their way into an unforeseeable future, commanding only that we ever walk in fellowship, with his love embracing us all.

Our present task requires that we discover how to best interpret neighborly love in this difficult trial. We acknowledge, without discussion, that we should not obey the command to put homosexuals to death. But, how much more, if any, revision is necessary? That is our dilemma. We must open our hearts and minds and seek divine guidance. Lord, grant us the wisdom to know how to be faithful to the Holy Scriptures and to the urgings of the Holy Spirit.

1. "Once to Every Man and Nation." James Russell Lowell (1819-1891).

Comment [M29]: Indicate another example by adding "Thirdly,"

Comment [M30]: Suggest using "Despite" instead of "Whatever".

Comment [M31]: Incorrect grammar: add "are" or change "engaged" to present tense.

Comment [M32]: Consider using active verb here: delete "have" and use "choose" to keep tense consistent.

Comment [M33]: Close spaces before and after comma.

Comment [M34]: Close one space.

Comment [M35]: Close one space here too.

Comment [M36]: Close one space.

Comment [M37]: Add comma.