



STATEMENT DL045

Questions & Answers

What Bible verses are most commonly used to support

“holy laughter,” and what is your response to them?

by Hank Hanegraaff

Acts 2:13. One passage frequently abused in the current Laughing Revival occurs in Luke’s account of the day of Pentecost: “Some, however, made fun of them and said, *They have had too much wine.*”

Leaders of this “Counterfeit Revival,” like Rodney Howard-Browne and John Arnott, seem bent on convincing their audiences that the apostles were manifesting all of the characteristics of drunkards. “Why did they think the believers were drunk?” asks Rodney Howard-Browne. “Because they must have *acted* like drunk people” (*The Reality of the Person of the Holy Spirit*, 24–25). Laughing Revival advocates argue that, if it happened during the First Pentecost, then it should happen today in an even broader and more spectacular fashion in what many are calling the “Second Pentecost.”

If you look at the passage, the first thing you see is that only some said they were drunk. Second, those who identified them as drunk were scoffers. Others, far from being convinced of their drunkenness, were instead amazed that “each of us hears them speak in his own native language” (NIV). Luke says that they were amazed because these unlearned Galileans were “declaring the wonders of God in a language they could understand. Thus, they were clearly not emitting incoherent noises in a drunken stupor or slurring their words, but they were cogently articulating “the wonders of God.” Peter, in fact, spoke so powerfully that 3,000 people stampeded their way to Calvary.

If the apostles truly were acting like drunks, Peter would have likely given an alternative explanation for their actions — attributing their bizarre behavior to an overwhelming “spiritual intoxication.” Instead, he corrected the scoffers by saying, “These men are not drunk, as you suppose” (v. 15).

In truth, the Bible gives no evidence that the believers “acted like drunk people.” The only behavior disclosed and discussed in Luke’s narrative is *speaking in tongues* (vv. 4–11). There is therefore *no basis whatsoever in the text* for imagining or attributing any other action or conduct (such as laughing, falling down, etc.) to those Spirit-filled believers.

Ephesians 5:18. Another verse commonly misrepresented by Laughing Revival advocates encapsulates Paul’s admonition that we should “*not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead,*” Paul urges, “*be filled with the Spirit.*” Being “drunk in the Spirit,” according to holy laughter factions, is the God-ordained counterpart to being drunk on alcohol — hence, the rationale for the inebriated-like state and behavior of those caught up in holy laughter.

A careful examination, however, reveals that in no way can this passage be legitimately used to support “spiritual drunkenness.” To begin with, there is no reason to equate being filled with the Spirit with any form of “spiritual drunkenness.” In fact, the context of the passage indicates a consistent use of *contrasts* to differentiate *ungodly behavior* from *godly conduct*. For example, sexual immorality is contrasted with holiness (v. 3). Coarse jesting is contrasted with thanksgiving (v. 4). Foolishness is contrasted with wisdom (vv. 15–16). Likewise, drunkenness is contrasted with being filled with the Spirit (v. 18).

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To understand what “being filled with the Spirit” means, one need only read the next few verses which spell out the details in unmistakable terms: “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (vv. 19—20). Nowhere is there even a hint of the kind of erratic behavior promoted in Laughing Revival circles.

It is patently absurd to say that “spiritual debauchery” is the God-ordained counterpart to “plain old debauchery.” Or that precedents for indulging in “holy immorality,” “holy impurity,” and “holy greed” can be found in the Bible. Yet if “holy laughter” advocates are to stay consistent with their interpretation of verse 18, no other conclusion can logically follow — for the type of reasoning they use in claiming a biblical basis for so-called “spiritual drunkenness” can also be used to justify other “sanctified” acts of debauchery, immorality, impurity, and greed.

A representative picture of the Bible’s stance against the Laughing Revival phenomenon can readily be gleaned from various portions of Paul’s writings. The apostle listed, for example, “self-control” as one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23) — clearly the opposite of the uncontrolled and chaotic activities that are characteristic of “holy laughter” gatherings. “Let us be alert and sober,” Paul told the Thessalonians (1 Thes. 5:6 NASB) as he contrasted drunkenness with sobriety (vv. 7—8). And to young Timothy, he advised to “be sober in all things” (2 Tim. 4:5). With so much emphasis on “self-control” and sobriety, the burden falls upon holy laughter proponents to reconcile their views with Scripture — a formidable, indeed impossible, undertaking.

Despite this impossibility, some still appeal to personal experience to validate their behavior. This, too, is a dangerous premise from which to operate. As fallen creatures our personal judgments are all too fallible — particularly when it concerns spiritual matters. We should not test experience in light of experience; rather, we should test experience in light of the final court of arbitration, the Word of God. This is precisely why God directs His people to search His written Word for counsel in matters of doctrine and daily living. Faithful followers of Christ must therefore look *not* to their own personal experiences, but to the Scriptures as the ultimate measuring rod. As Scripture itself exhorts us, “test all things” (1 Thes. 5:21; cf. Acts 17:11; 1 Tim. 3:16).

Even a cursory examination of the Scripture-twisting tactics of men like Rodney Howard-Browne and John Arnott reveals their propensity for taking Scripture out of context to develop a pretext for their convoluted notions. This is why today, more than ever, it is incumbent upon believers to be so familiar with the truth that when a counterfeit looms on the horizon, they will know it instantaneously.