Why We Covenant: The Roots of JBU Rules

This semester marks the 51st anniversary of the passing of the school's founder. Dr. John Elward Brown Sr. died in California on February 12th, 1957, a mere two months before the completion of the Cathedral.

Thanks to the passage of time, the community lifestyle agreements that Dr. Brown created for JBU are sometimes criticized as remnants of 20th century fundamentalist legalism. Some students, annoyed by their revoked rights to smoke or drink, might say that Brown's spirit continues to hover over campus, wagging a ghostly finger and limiting the amounts of fun allowed at JBU. Student resentment has lifted since the overruling of the dancing prohibition, but the question still lingers in many students' minds: why are we agreeing to forgo certain activities that are perfectly allowable? For example, if Jesus didn't forbid the consumption of alcohol, who was this "holier-than-thou" John Brown, that he thought it should be completely avoided?

The fact is that students, employees, and outsiders alike are quick to forget Brown's background. During John's teen years, his conservative Quaker parents despaired that anything good would ever come of him. Few people realize that Brown had more than his share of "worldly" stints – as a prankster in grade school, a caller for square dances, and a heavily-addicted cigarette smoker. His first interaction with the Salvation Army was not to follow that legendary drum, but to make a monetary donation to one of its members – an attractive young woman he wished to impress. His "overly" strict guidelines that he later set out in his radio addresses,

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Excerpt from the 15 November 1960 issue of the Threefold Advocate

Line-cutting in the dining hall and running to the cafeteria are not acceptable practices.

Here are several reasons why they are not accepted.

1. People visiting the campus may form a poor impression from both practices.

2. When a person is interested in going to school at JBU, he comes to take a tour of the campus. If he sees the cutting in line at the cafeteria, he may think: "What kind of rights do you have here, anyway?"

Students can show courtesy in the line. It doesn't take much effort or time to go to the end of the line. Students can do many things for the school, faculty, and staff.

LET'S GROW UP!

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The Lantern is a nonprofit publication which seeks to educate its readership about John Brown University's history and heritage. Copies are available at the Archives Office and on the Archives website at www.jbu.edu/library/archives. Editor: Jen Heller  Assistant Editor: Amber Wilson
The witnessing church is the church of progress. The witnessing Christian is the soul-winning Christian. Just as the church leaves the high place of a witness, to that extent she leaves the place of power. We are not in the world to defend Christ, and defend the Bible, and defend God; we are here to witness to the mighty saving powers of the blood of Christ.

The cure for skepticism in the church and the world is old time, Holy Ghost evangelism—the Holy Ghost witnessed to what had been said.

Excerpt from The Holy Spirit and the Soul Winner

(continued from front)

particularly his discussions on the dangers of smoking. Brown was careful to share about his own battle with tobacco addiction before criticizing smoking as a practice. He was also decades ahead of his time in realizing the health dangers connected to smoking. Rather than simply instructing Christians to avoid cigarettes because of their edgy status in concurrent culture, Brown pleaded with his audiences to recognize the many harmful side effects of the habit on individuals’ health.

Despite some accusations otherwise, John Brown never thought of the Christian life as a joyless experience. His sermons were filled with stories of interest, jokes, and humorous proverbs. His exuberant charisma was unbeatable. Each time he returned to Arkansas from an evangelism campaign, students and staff alike would crowd to the train station to welcome "Brother Brown" home.

All of this is not to say that J. E. Brown was anything more than human. At times he could be unduly strict, and many older alumni and staff can remember following his orders to an inflexible degree—a "benevolent dictator," some have called him. Brown expected compliance, even when he gave employees just a few hours' notice before they were to accompany him on thousand-mile business trips. The fact remains, however, that it has become far too easy for modern JBU to dismiss Brown's ideas as fundamentalist hash— that is, as quaint or historically informative, but irrelevant and too conservative for modern generations. Though Brown's sermons were filled with the do's and don't's of his contemporary culture, Christians can always learn from fellow believers' lives. Brown's perspectives on the abstentions and habits of the Christian life still have value, when read with the correct perspective. As a new semester begins for JBU, it couldn't hurt for the community to reevaluate its attitude towards Brown's behavioral expectations. One can always learn something new from the lives of great men.