

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;" Hebrews 12:14-15



'TIS THE SEASON

The holidays are here and to quote a famous carol "tis the season to be jolly". Millions of people around the world will celebrate. Some will celebrate with alcohol to get their jollies while others will abstain.

As soon as the word alcohol is mentioned in many Christian circles, the great debate begins. "Did Jesus celebrate with wine or grape juice?"

That debate will not end for most until the wedding feast of the Lamb.

However, when it comes to drunkenness and being drunkards, there is no debate. The command in Scripture is clear when it says, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation or wasteful, but be filled with the Spirit."¹

The waste of drunkards and drunkenness can be found in the devastation of relationships.

In all my years, I have never heard a son or daughter praise their father or mother for their drunkenness. Instead, I have listened to a steady refrain of pain, poverty, and bitterness.

Drunkards and their drunkenness also waste human life. Yesterday morning, a drunk driver killed one of our church members while she was on her way to church. Her daughter-in-law and grandchildren were following in the car behind her and witnessed the wreck. It was a horrific day for her family, our church, the drunk driver, his family and society.

This devastation of human life doesn't happen just once a year. According to MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), one American dies from an alcohol related accident approximately every 45 minutes!

The waste continues. Scripture says that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God.² How horrible it is for a human soul to spend eternity wasting in separation from God. But this waste can be stopped. It can be stopped through a change in identity and a resulting control of self.

This change is how some of the Corinthians stopped being drunkards almost 2,000 years ago. When they turned from their sin and trusted Christ, their sins were washed away. Their identity instantly changed from being drunkards to being children of God. In Christ, they entered into a right relationship with God and as a result received the Holy Spirit.³

However, even after this identity change, some still struggled with drunkenness. What they needed to experience was the control of self which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Control of self is experienced when one is dependent on the Holy Spirit's strength to stop intoxicating his or her self. Control of self results from submitting to and abiding in Christ.

Control of self should not be confused with self-discipline. Self-discipline is when one chooses to stop getting drunk by his or her own strength. Signing contracts, declaring boundaries, and selecting accountability partners are used to boost and empower self-discipline. Self-discipline can stop the waste of a physical life from drunkenness, but it will not stop the waste of human souls.

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'TIS THE SEASON . . .

When I turned from my sin and trusted Christ, I too was cleansed and made in right standing with God through Jesus. I was born again⁴ as a new creation in Christ.⁵ My identity changed from being a drunkard to being a child of God.⁶

Although I had a new identity and my sins were forgiven,⁷ it took several months of renewing my mind with Scriptures before I chose to submit to the Spirit rather than intoxicating myself. I decided to stop my drunkenness after I began to understand my real motivation behind drinking alcohol.

About 3,000 years ago King Solomon said, "Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more."⁸ My motivation for consuming large quantities of alcohol started as a result of my bitterness which had begun at the young age of 7. Dad was

dying. I prayed that he wouldn't die. But, he died. Sitting in a pew at the funeral, I thought that if only I would have said a better prayer or had been a better son, God would have heard my prayer, and dad wouldn't have died. Feelings of not measuring up and not being good enough for God overwhelmed me.

I blamed myself for my dad's death until I reached puberty. After puberty, I began to reason like an unsaved adult. Trying to rid myself of thinking I didn't measure up, I chose to believe that God didn't measure up and blamed Him for my dad's death. I incorrectly reasoned, "If God were good, He would have answered a child's prayer. Therefore, He isn't good."

In college, Sigmund Freud's philosophy reinforced my false belief. He reasoned that if God were good, He would put an end to sickness, evil and death. Since He hadn't, God was either powerless to stop evil, evil Himself or He was just a figment of man's imagination. So, I continued in my incorrect belief that God was the One who didn't measure up; I don't need Him, and I will measure up without Him. I was an angry, bitter young man.

Because I felt unable to measure up, I turned to the same thing my grandfather had used to forget his "poverty" or bitterness. My grandfather gave me my first drink at the age of 13. I vividly remember that night. We were sitting by a fire, and he reached into a brown paper bag. He pulled out a bottle with the words "Old Crow Whiskey" on the label. I had seen that bottle with a black crow on it before. Grandfather seemed to have them everywhere. He had one in his trunk, one behind some boards in his garage, one in his toolbox, etc. They usually were only half full.

He opened the bottle and took a big swig. After swallowing it, he said, "Aaaaaah! Then he smiled, looked me in the eyes and without saying a word, handed me the bottle. I held the bottle in my hand and looked at him as if to say, "Should I take a drink?" All he did was nod his head in affirmation. Slowly, I put the bottle to my lips and took a big swig just like he did. It was nasty tasting stuff. I wanted to spit it out, but I didn't. I desperately desired his acceptance. As the whiskey made its fiery decent down my throat, it burned like the dickens. After it settled in my stomach, I said, "Aaaaaah!" Just like he did.

After a couple more swigs, I began to feel like I measured up. A few more and I didn't have a care in the world. Alcohol and I got acquainted that night, and we quickly became best friends.

While in high school, I viewed drinking as a tool for celebrating. But looking back, I would have to say my drinking was self-centered. Even during that time, I used or abused alcohol on the weekends to try to wash away the bitter thoughts of not measuring up that I collected during the week.

When I got to college, I began drinking during the week in addition to the weekends. Alcohol eased the emotional

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pain of my mistakes on and off the football field. Without realizing it, I gradually became dependent on alcohol to relieve my bitterness for not measuring up. My increasing drunkenness generated more mistakes and bitterness in my life, and it became a vicious cycle.

To remove my bitterness, I had to first admit that I was bitter. Then, I had to replace my bitter thoughts with correct thoughts about God, about my identity in Christ and about forgiveness.

Forgiveness came first for me. The moment I came to Christ, I knew all my sins were forgiven. Once I knew and believed I was forgiven, I could gift forgiveness to others and myself. It became natural for me to go to Mom and my wife Connie and ask their forgiveness for sinning against them. My grandfather had already died by that time, so I just forgave him from my heart.

It took several months for me to believe the Spirit's revelation that God giving man a choice to sin is actually love and not evil. I began to understand that without choice there would be no love. Without choice, we would only be robots forced by programming to obey and serve God. God revealed His goodness to me when I read and believed that He "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."⁹

"Wow!" I thought. "God is working even my sins together for my good because I love Him! And, even though I don't understand it, He is working the death of my father together for my good also! He is even working all my past drunken wastefulness together for my good!" Once I received these truths, I fell deeply in love with Father God.

Even after I began to understand God's love and forgiveness, I still needed to understand my identity in Christ. I needed to know deep down that I'm complete in Him – that I'm adequate in Him – that I became a new creature in Christ the moment I believed in Him. I needed to believe the truth that I now measure up because I am in Christ, not because I choose to get drunk or choose not to get drunk.

Once I really believed my completeness in Christ, drunkenness was no longer an issue. I quit cold turkey. The Holy Spirit became my counselor, boundary setter and accountability partner. He enabled me to never return.

The temptation to choose to get drunk has never left me. I am still tempted to get drunk because I continue to be tempted to think I do not measure up as a Christian. But, as I reject the lie and believe the truth, I choose not to get drunk. That is the way God has stopped my madness, my drunkenness, and the wastefulness in my life and relationships.

So 'tis the season to be jolly' not from alcohol but because of what Christ has done, is doing and will do for us. I pray that your holidays will be safe and full of His gift of joy!

Love ya,

Greg

P.S. We are in the process of developing an addiction recovery program that we will kick off in the spring. If you or someone you know is interested, please give us a call at 770-502-8050.

GOD'S Gifts to US



"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE
LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN!"

EPHESIANS 4:8

Love	Romans 5:5
Comfort	2 Corinthians 1:3-4
Rest	Matthew 11:28
Physical Provision	Matthew 6:31-33
Faith	Romans 12:3
Repentance	Acts 11:18
Magnificent Promises	2 Peter 1:4
Everything Pertaining to Life	2 Peter 1:3
An Example in Jesus	John 13:15
Righteousness	Romans 3:21
Strength and Power	Psalms 68:35
Glory	Psalms 84:11
Wisdom	James 1:5
Victory	1 Corinthians 15:57
Perseverance	Roman 15:5
Encouragement	Roman 15:5
Breath and Life	Acts 17:25
Peace	John 14:27
Grace	Ephesians 4:7-8
His Spirit	2 Corinthians 1:22
A Ministry of Harmony	2 Corinthians 5:18
Help in Times of Trouble	Psalms 46:1

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|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1 Ephesians 5:18 | 4 John 3:7 | 7 Colossians 2:10 |
| 2 I Corinthians 6:9-10 | 5 II Corinthians 5:17 | 8 Proverbs 31:6-7 |
| 3 I Corinthians 6:11 | 6 I John 3:1 | 9 Romans 8:28 |



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