

Dissipation

Ephesians 5:15-20

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father. (Ephesians 5:15-20 (NASB))

Today, I would like for us to begin a two, perhaps three part study into the difficulties and the pitfalls that we can expect to encounter if we dare test the limits of “drinking alcohol to excess”. And also today, I would ask that you bear with me because the message is one of more practical thought processing, rather than of spiritual depth. Is such a message proper from the pulpit? Not usually, but I believe that the Lord is leading me to give this one, so I will.

I would also ask you to bear with me in my use of some of my own personal experiences as illustrations. I genuinely wish that I did not have some of those personal experiences in this matter, but unfortunately I do, so I will use some of those as examples.

. . . I'll begin by reminding you that I was a relative late-comer to Christianity in that I was twenty-nine years old before I finally realized that I needed a Savior. And regrettably, some of those earliest years of my life were turbulent for me, allowing me opportunity to build up more sinful habits and attitudes and behaviors than I would like to remember, “Baggage” that I would need to deal with in my new relationship with Christ.

And it was almost immediately upon my receiving Christ that I recall the Holy Spirit beginning to do the uncomfortable but necessary works that the Holy Spirit does. John chapter 16 tells us that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and righteousness and judgment, and He did that with me. He immediately began to dig into my errant soul, searching out those sinful habits and attitudes and behaviors that were not fitting for a newborn child of the King.

Some of those habits and attitudes and behaviors were below the surface and not so obvious. But my drinking and the attending attitudes and behaviors that went with it could easily be seen. And I recall that I began to see my own problems right away. It

was as if a light had been turned on. Even though my faith was still in its infancy, I was able to see the ill-effects that alcohol could bring to me and to my family.

It was also then that God brought to my memory all of the misery and mistreatment that had been wrought upon our family by my father's drinking habits. He had died when I was only ten, and because of that, I had not been able to get to know him well. But regrettably, even the few memories that I had of Him were mostly all bad ones, and most all of those having to do with his drinking and his mistreatment of my Mom when he had had too much to drink.

I wish even now that I had some better memories of my Dad, but I don't. And sadly, I know that he would have wished that I could have had good memories of him, because according to family friends who knew him well, my Dad was a very decent sort of man when he was sober. But his excessive drinking ruined whatever opportunities might have otherwise taken place.

Folks, there is an unfortunate subtlety that takes place within the minds of those who drink. Though they be of reasonable intelligence, as with my father, able to do many things well, the alcohol has a way of confusing their ability to think rightly, and they never quite perceive what a mess they are making of their lives. But may I say, their loved ones know, and they suffer.

As for me, although through my father's behavior, I knew the misery that alcohol could bring to a family, still, just as soon as I was old enough to drink, that was at age 17 because I was in the Air Force, I dove into that habit, head first, and I did not come up for air until those days that I spoke about a moment ago, when the Holy Spirit began to convict me of how wrong I was.

May I say that to many who would have observed me during those days, my drinking might not have looked like it was to "excess"! I really did keep up a good image. I became successful in my work at the bank. And I was able to keep a reasonable family atmosphere going. But looking back on those days, I can recall that there was always a drink somewhere near my hand and I always had an angry spirit, a combination that my father exhibited.

But again, and thankfully so, it was in those earliest days of my salvation that God began to reveal to me some of the real and dangerous pitfalls that alcohol could bring, especially within my ability to think straight . . . two pitfalls in particular. One pitfall was that I could quickly develop an "eye" for women other than my sweet wife, and that is a very common pitfall for men; the other pitfall was that alcohol dulled my mind and kept

me from realizing the importance of my family. And those two concerns became very, very important to me.

But it was also in those days that I began to recognize that in some of the other regular drinkers that I knew, some level of alcohol could remain in their system with only a little bit needed to be added to keep their senses continually a little bit “dulled”, not drunk, but clearly “dulled”.

And that is part of the definition of this word in front of us here in verse 18, “dissipation”.

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation. (Ephesians 5:18)

“Dissipation” is one of those words that we don’t often use, but as with each of the words in this bible, God has used it for very special reasons. And here it fits so very well to describe the subtle pitfall of being a “regular drinker”.

Considering this word “dissipation”, my first thought goes to the visual image of smoke or fog. It usually only remains for a short while and then quickly vanishes. It “dissipates” into the air and disappears.

Here, the Lord is giving an exact same analogy to the effects that drinking can bring upon our lives. To the regular drinker, their senses will remain slightly dulled by the alcohol that remains within them, and the hours of the day will pass, will “dissipate”, will “evaporate”, oftentimes without the person really remembering all the things that have taken place within those hours. The very regrettable part of that whole experience is that while yes, the alcohol did smooth out some of the rough edges of the day, in the process, the person missed out on so many, many better things that they should have taken part in, especially those things having to do with love and family. Those very “best things” in life, good marriages, good friendships, good jobs, they all simply dissipate into thin air and the person doesn’t even know what is taking place until they have already lost those things most dear to them.

For myself, as I began to think through all of these things, I recall confronting myself with question of why I thought I needed to drink in the first place. And the only answer I could come up with was that I just did not like myself or my life circumstances very well. But with only a little bit of alcohol, even one drink, or just a couple of beers, things took on a whole different look.

And as I observed other drinkers, that seemed also to be much the same with them. Alcohol is magic in that it blurs the mind and the senses so that a person doesn’t have

to see and deal with the “real truth” that is taking place. It is much like the words we studied last week from Romans 1:25,

25 . . . they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. (Romans 1:25)

Isn't such rationale utterly silly? We don't like the way our life looks, so we take a couple of drinks of alcohol to blur our mind, and then suddenly things look so much better. Sadly, nothing has really changed. We have simply exchanged the truth for a lie and we foolishly begin to believe the lie. What fools we are!

Again, and thankfully so, shortly after I received Christ, the Holy Spirit began to do His cleansing work in my heart, my mind and my soul and I became convinced that I needed to stop drinking and stop behaving so foolishly. And I did! And also thankfully, as I agreed with God that I should quit drinking, He was generous to me and gave me all the help I needed to put it all behind me.

But listen . . . for myself, I also realized that I needed to go one step further than some other people might need to go. I had to become a “teetotaler”. Why was that so? It was because I came to the conclusion that the problems that my Dad experienced were probably passed on to me. And I was my father's son.

And I now know that my decision in those days was the best one I could have made, because “curses”, such as the “curse” of dependence upon alcohol really are passed through the bloodlines.

So, for over forty years now, I have abstained from all forms of alcohol. And I am so much better for having made and kept that strong decision.

A question . . . does every person who receives Christ have to become a “teetotaler”? Should everyone stop drinking altogether? May I quickly say that there is no command given in the scriptures that demands that we give up drinking altogether! As we know, Jesus' first miracle was that of turning water into wine. And for some people, wine can have a good “settling” effect for their digestive system. The Apostle Paul advised Timothy . . .

23 No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. (1Timothy 5:23)

But a caution is also in order. Along with these approvals for the drinking of a little wine are also a multitude of warnings about “excessive drinking”. Listen to these! In Proverbs 20 we read . . .

1 Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise. (Proverbs 20:1 (NIV))

And in the Book of Isaiah we read . . .

11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them! (Isaiah 5:11 (ESV))

And in

7 These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are swallowed by wine, they stagger with strong drink, they reel in vision, they stumble in giving judgment. 8 For all tables are full of filthy vomit, with no space left. (Isaiah 28:7-8 (ESV))

And folks, these kinds of warnings go on and on and on, with the warning far outnumbering the approvals.

The best answer for us is given within the words of our passage for today. Listen, beginning in verse 15 . . .

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:15-18)

As we said in the message last week, the “wisdom” spoken about here comes from the Holy Spirit. And we are to “walk” as “wise” men and not as “unwise”, making the best use of our time. And as we are told here, the days that we live in and the world that swirls about us each day is truly very, very evil, reaching out to grab hold of us and to pull us into its ways.

But you and I who have Christ as our Lord are called to put one thing above all else. Verse 17

17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Above all else, you and I are to first and always understand what the “will of the Lord is”. So then, a simple question, can you even imagine for a moment that it is the “will of God”, that it would even remotely please Him, for you to be even slightly dependent upon a drink of alcohol just to make it through the day. And even beyond that, can you imagine for a moment that God is pleased with you when your mind starts to get blurred by the alcohol and you begin to say and do things that are foolish and unseemly. And even beyond that, can you even for a moment imagine that God is pleased with you

when you get mean and nasty, because that is the exact effect that alcohol has on many, many people, especially men. That was so with my Dad!

No! It is not God's will and it does not please Him when His beloved children do those silly and awful and mean things. And that is part of the warning that is being given here. As I studied these words, especially in the original Greek, the word translated as dissipation also has a meaning of "excess", even to the point of "debauchery".

So then, as we said a moment ago, while it is not a sin to have a drink of wine or other alcohol, once the amount that a person drinks becomes "excess", and provokes in them to unseemly behavior, then that is when they are drunk with wine and their drinking becomes sinful.

And while that sounds like a very simple answer, unfortunately it isn't. Why isn't it. It is because if a person truly wants to drink, their minds get blinded to the truth and they begin making wrong decisions. "Excess" becomes a matter of opinion based more upon their emotions than by their good reasoning.

When I was at the point of making those choices for myself, I asked myself such questions as, "am I drunk when I can't keep control of my car as I drive?" Or "am I drunk when I quickly get nasty and unkind to my wife and children"? Or "am I drunk when everyone else is wrong and I am always right", and on and on . . . And I had to come to the conclusion that I would be drunk when even one small part of my ability to reason was affected. So I decided to test myself and I found out that it only took one drink to alter my ability to think as I did before I took that first drink. Therefore, one drink was "excess" and made me "drunk with wine".

Most drunks really don't like to hear those words. But I had to come to the conclusion that if I was ever going to have a relationship with the Lord, I was going to have to have Him as my "crutch" instead of alcohol. And if I ever hoped to have a good relationship with my family, I would need to be completely sober all of the time.

But again, such things are an individual decision that every person has to make between themselves and the Lord, themselves and their family.

In conclusion, I would caution everyone to be really, really honest with themselves and with the Lord. And I would suggest that if a person still continues to drink, that they, on a regular basis, asked a loved one who would be really honest with them to tell them if they are "drinking to excess".

I hope to continue this study next week at which time we will dwell more on what God thinks about our drinking habits. For now, may we close with these simple words in Verse 17 . . .

17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.