

for whatsoever doth make manifest is light” (v. 13).

Light does this. Notice how the sunlight shows up every mark—even on the windows that have just been cleaned! But the reproof provided by our actions can do something for us too. First, it can, and should, heighten the awareness of the differences that must exist between ourselves and others. We *are* separate. We *cannot* have fellowship. The reproof drives home this very fact. But it is at this point that we are most vulnerable. It is here that we encounter the danger of self-righteousness. The second thing that reproof can do for us, therefore, is to add to our own obligations. It is a witness from which we dare not fall. It marks out a path which we have chosen to walk and which we can only maintain with the help and grace of God. This should prevent us becoming puffed up and proud of our separation.

This is something that applies, as we have suggested, in every aspect of our life, but perhaps especially in the way we choose to use our

leisure, the paths we pursue in ‘spare’ time when we think that no eye sees, the things we allow when we are relaxing which can be a contradiction, if not a denial, of the very things for which we stand.

Well has the apostle said: “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (vv. 15,16).

Points for thought and discussion

- *What Bible examples are there of pastimes/amusements? Are they good or bad?*
- *To what extent should we consider our brother’s weakness/conscience in pursuing our leisure activities?*
- *Is there more justification of an otherwise selfish activity if it is undertaken with other brothers and sisters?*

“Be not drunk”

Joni Mannell

WINE IS A mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Prov. 20:1). With those words from the Proverbs in my mind, very conscious of the fact that I was one of the few not having ‘a drink’, I sat and watched. I remember feeling increasingly disheartened and disappointed by the sight of people I respected, who had a position of authority over me, losing all sense of dignity, and their ability to see, walk or talk straight, through the influence of alcohol. They stumbled and staggered much like the description in the Scriptures of the way God views nations who have lost their way and are driven by whim.

This experience will no doubt be shared by many when in the company of colleagues or in other similar situations: normal, sincere people you have observed or possibly spend a lot of time with; and the next day they cannot remember how they got home the previous night.

When I consider my own personal stance on this kind of issue I cannot help but be aware that there seems to be something inherently unnatu-

ral and unacceptable, in the presence of God, about someone who has chosen to intoxicate his or her mind and body with drink or drugs. When influenced by alcohol or drugs, things are said that would not or should not normally have been said. Behaviour abounds that, when sober, would have been avoided. Integrity and respect are lost, along with time, health and money.

Consider a few Biblical examples. Noah’s nakedness was seen by his youngest son, who was cursed as a result. Lot unwittingly slept with both his surviving daughters while under the influence, and the ancestors of the Moabites and Ammonites were born as a result. While Abigail tried to pacify David after foolish Nabal had treated him with such contempt, her husband was drinking himself to death back at home. David’s son Amnon, when least able to discern, think and react due to the amount he had had to drink, was killed by his brother Absalom. King Elah of Israel, having been on the throne barely a year, was killed by Zimri whilst drunk in his own steward’s house. On each of these occasions, where we find a character under the influ-

ence, no good arises as a consequence. The same is true in any other example you might think of. Nothing positive is ever portrayed by those under the influence of alcohol.

As we read the Scriptures we hear the voice of Jesus and the apostles exhorting us to watch and be ready for the imminent arrival of our Redeemer, who comes like a thief in the night. I try to imagine the grief of a saint who has missed the bridegroom's call and forfeited a place at the wedding, not being in a fit state to stand before the Master, having been indulging in drink or some other pursuit that rendered sound judgement and awareness impossible.

I am driven to consider the analogy of Paul when he said: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (1 Cor. 10:23). It is not that the Bible categorically rules out drinking or drugs. There is no direct command in the Bible prohibiting use and consumption of these things. God leaves it to our own conscience. But by what will our consciences be influenced? A little further down that same passage Paul concludes: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (v. 31). It is Paul also who reminds us that, among others, "drunkards . . . shall [not] inherit the kingdom of God" (6:10).

I have felt the pressure to be accepted among peers and colleagues, in a culture where heavy drinking and experimenting with drugs is not regarded as wrong or unacceptable. Many will even take the view that you cannot really enjoy yourself or have fun without losing control. As they spur one another along the spirit shelf, or to another round, do I simply accept this behaviour and mentality as being the norm, or not?

We know well Paul's advice to Timothy: "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23). If we were considering using Paul's

statement about Timothy's welfare to justify excessive drinking, then we should balance it with Numbers 6, which details for us the Nazarite vow. This rite was an individual's way of voluntarily demonstrating his separateness and holiness to and for God, one aspect being no consumption of any strong drink.

I have felt the discomfort of being the odd one out and fearful of looking, or of being accused of being, over pious as my conviction to stand firm in my principles came under question and scrutiny, even in my own mind. With Jesus beside me, however, my resolve can remain strong, and his presence can change my need to feel accepted by men to a desire to be acceptable to God.

Consider these verses from Proverbs:

"Listen, my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path. Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags . . . Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. 'They hit me', you will say, 'but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?' " (23:19-21,29-35, NIV).

As we strive daily to find ways of demonstrating our thanks, gratitude and appreciation for the gift we have been given in Christ Jesus, let us remember the challenge that we are "bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20).

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" . . . To be filled with the Spirit is not to become full of the Spirit. The Spirit is the filler. But with what had they then to become full? . . . the parallel in Colossians helps. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (3:16). To be filled with the Spirit results in a mind rich in the understanding of God and His ways as revealed in His word. Instead of the excitement of wine we must have the elevation of thought that comes from the ardent love of the Word of God.

John Carter, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 1944, p. 116