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A CURE FOR ADDICTION

It is sometimes said that an addictive personality never loses an addiction. Instead they may substitute one addiction for another. That is why people who try to stop smoking often gain weight; and why some doctors recommend chewing gum when the urge to smoke strikes. Sometimes a serious drug addiction is treated by substituting a (perhaps) less serious drug. The addiction most often mentioned in the Bible is drunkenness, an addiction to alcohol. Paul, the apostle, was not a doctor, although he was often accompanied by one in the person of Luke. Paul recommends a cure for alcohol addiction; and it involves the substitution of one addiction for another.

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; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. (Eph 5:18-21)

It is probably important to note that Paul uses two different words for the condition of the reader. He doesn't say, "Don't be drunk with wine; be drunk with the Spirit." He makes a distinction. Being drunk is an excess that turns a possibly good thing into something that is not good. We are to be filled with the Spirit, which will neither be excess or harmful. There is no way to get too much of the Spirit; there is no excess.

There are several types of drunks: belligerent drunks, sleepy drunks, talkative drunks. The excess of bellicosity results in fights, jail, or even death. The sleepy drunk may seem the least harmful, but often loses productive time. Excess of talking can just make people turn away from you; or it may result in saying something you will regret later.

The results of being filled with the Spirit, on the other hand, are all positive: speaking, singing, thanking, submitting. The speaking is not like that of the drunkard; the speech is about God. The parallel passage in the letter to the Colossians (3:16) refers to teaching and admonishing. Admonition is not the current practice of beating others over the head with their sins; rather it is warning with gentleness. How many of our psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs say, in essence, "You're a

sinner; you're going to hell; and I'm happy about that"? Let us hope none.

"Is any merry? Let him sing psalms." (Jas 5:13) Singing and making melody in your heart are natural results of being filled with the Spirit. What more could one be merry about than knowing Christ in you? Than knowing adoption by God? Than knowing we have an eternal home with God? And knowing all those things, we sing.

Thanksgiving is an everyday thing. Gratefulness flows from an awareness of the Spirit within us. That awareness reveals to us God's love and forgiveness. Because we are forgiven, we forgive; because we forgive, we are relieved of the burden of resentment. Our souls are lighter, so we thank God. Our God would accept our thanks on our own; how much more when we have the authority of His own son backing up our thanks.

Submission is not a word Americans particularly like. We claim to be an independent people who have made ourselves what we are by dint of our own ingenuity. We don't submit. The American flag dips to nobody. Submission is for wimps. But being filled with the Spirit tells us that this is just pride and braggadocio. Submission to one another is evidence of love. No marriage will last without mutual submission. No church will last without it either. Being filled with the Spirit, we know that we are in submission to God, who is above all. Because of this, we are equal with all other Christians. Nobody is better, or worse. There is no rank in God's church.

Nobody really enjoys drunkenness. They may feel good for a while, but they either regret it shortly or try to get drunk again to try to regain the good feeling. In like manner, nobody ever regrets being filled with the Spirit. There are no negative side effects, no hangovers, no jail time. It is not drunkenness, but it is satisfaction.

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THE SYMBOLIC JESUS

Symbology is a difficult thing to tie down. What symbols mean differ based on a number of factors. For instance, the green on the flag of Washington State symbolizes the Evergreen State, but the green on the flags of Libya, Saudi Arabia, and some other countries symbolizes Islam. The symbol varies by culture and locale. Other symbols may vary over time. The bear in Daniel 7 is symbolic of the nation of Persia, but today nobody associates a bear with Iraq. Instead, today a bear is more likely to symbolize Russia. This has misled some people into a modern interpretation of the Revelation in which they saw a war between the eagle (the United States) and the bear (the Soviet Union, at the time the interpretation was put forward), even though such events would be clearly outside the scope of the prophecy of the Revelation. Time has even caused an alteration of that symbolism, because the Soviet Union currently no longer exists.

This variation in the meaning of symbols over time and culture make it difficult to interpret the specific meaning of certain parts of the Bible. In the intervening hundreds of years, we may have lost the cultural significance of certain things. Sometimes we can understand the symbols based on other scriptures of the

The fact that John saw Jesus with white hair is testament to his living again.

time. Sometimes the context gives an idea of what the symbol means. Occasionally we have a historical reference that helps. And sometimes we just have to take the overall meaning of a passage without knowing the meaning of the specific symbols the original readers would have understood. That is what makes reading the Revelation so daunting for many people.

Early in the Revelation we get a symbolic view of Jesus. We may never fully understand this view, but we can get some picture of Jesus as portrayed in this book.

And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his

voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. (Rev 1:12-18)

While some of the references are obscure, we can learn much about Jesus from what we can interpret. It is a magnificent picture of the risen, triumphant lord of all the earth.

Appearance

It is not clear today what the garment that Jesus wore might represent. It went all the way to the feet, and was belted under the armpits with a golden belt. The length of the garment indicates the wearer to be patrician, rather than working-class. It is entirely possible that such a garment equates Jesus with the emperor. An upper-class citizen would wear a toga that covered the lower extremities somewhat, but most still wore a short tunic. The emperor wore a robe that reached to the floor. So the garment Jesus was seen wearing may have shown him to be the ruler of the world the he indeed is: King of kings, and Lord of lords. The purpose of the golden belt is uncertain, although the color would indicate wealth or status. Such a belt was often the equivalent of a purse or wallet today, having money folded into it, since tunics did not have pockets.

A head and hair of white, like wool or snow, has long been symbolic of wisdom. "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." (Prov 16:31) John was presumably in his nineties when he saw the revelation, and was considered an ancient. To be old enough to have white hair may not have been common. One estimate of life expectancy in ancient Rome holds that only about 5% of the population at any given time was 65 or older. Anyone wise enough, or lucky enough, to live that long was worthy of respect. "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD." (Lev 19:32) Although Jesus died at the relatively young age of about 33, the fact that John saw him with white hair is testament to his living again. It is testament to his eternity. It is also symbolic of wisdom. In theory, the older one gets, the wiser he becomes. This is because of the experience he amasses. Thus the white hair may also say that this is someone to listen to. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that

sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” (Jn 5:24)

His eyes were as a flame of fire. Jewish readers would have been quite familiar with this phrase. In the account of Moses, they would have read, “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.” (Ex 3:2) The flame of fire represented the Angel of God (which usually meant God himself). Other readers, however, may have considered a more recent writing.

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thes 1:7-8)

That this flaming vengeance may be the issue even here is borne out by the later passage in the Revelation which repeats this phrase. In chapter 19, the rider of a white horse is characterized with the same eyes, and with a sword in his mouth, and is said to act “with the wrath of God.” Even today we speak of one who is intent on vengeance or full of wrath as having “eyes ablaze.”

Feet of brass were familiar as well. Daniel spoke of a being from God with blazing eyes and feet of polished brass. Ezekiel described the cherubim as having such feet. It is possible, then, that brazen feet represented the messengers of God. Feet of brass would not wear out on long trips to carry a message. Whether this is the meaning of the symbol or not, the symbol designated Jesus as representing God and equal (at least) with the angels.

The voice of many waters is easier to understand. Anyone who lives near, or spoke with such a voice, no wonder the Israelites at Sinai begged not to hear him again. One psalmist says this is just how God speaks. “The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters.” (Ps 29:3) Another psalm says, “The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.” (Ps 93:4) It is Ezekiel, however, who actually describes God’s voice as being like many waters. “His voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.” (Ezek 43:2) It makes sense, then, that John would use similar language, since the Revelation and Ezekiel share many phrases and thoughts. Thus Jesus is given the same status as God by this description of his voice.

In his hand were seven stars, which we are told are the angels of the seven churches. Rome was the center of the political world; Athens of the cultural world. Ephesus was almost literally the center of the physical world, as far as the Mediterranean civilization was concerned. It was the second largest city, and located

roughly half way between Rome and Antioch, the third largest. It was an easy sail from Alexandria, the fourth. Geographically speaking, Ephesus and the six churches north of it would represent the center of the earth. Each of the seven churches represents an aspect of that world. Jesus is the center of the spiritual world. We could say, like the old spiritual, “He’s got the whole world in his hands.”

Out of his mouth went a sharp, twoedged sword. This sword is not the defensive short sword of Ephesians 6 or Hebrews 4. This is a long sword, even a javelin, worn on the shoulder. Nevertheless, its nature of having two edges (literally two mouths) makes it similar to the one in Hebrews, which is the word of God and pierces “even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Heb 4:12) Thus, Jesus’ word is set for judgement and for destruction. The Jesus of the

It makes sense that John would use the language of Ezekiel to describe Jesus.

Revelation is no peaceable shepherd, but rather a fierce fighter for God.

When Moses was in the presence of God on Sinai, his face shone. He had to veil it so that the people would not see it fading away. In like manner, Jesus has a face that shines, but his will never fade. This is a Jesus constantly in the presence of God.

I am

Jesus closes this section with the statement, “I am.” This is the name that God told Moses to use when people asked who sent him. Jesus makes three “I am” and one “I have” statements. All relate to his present power. He is eternal, resurrected, and living. He possesses the keys, and thus has authority.

Other than the keys, which have long symbolized authority, there is little symbolic in these statements. They are pretty straightforward. The Jesus who appears as symbols needs no interpretation in the end. He is, was, and will be the keeper of the keys forever.

Although some of the interpretations above are speculative, they are based for the most part on other scriptures. Whether this interpretation is totally accurate or not, the final message is true. Jesus is powerful; Jesus is eternal; and Jesus is the judge. He is not someone you would want to stand before unless you were clothed in him.

SAYING THE WRONG THING

When someone is hurting, is sick, is dying, we always want to say the right thing. We want to say something comforting. We want to say *something*. Unfortunately, most of us haven't learned from Job's three friends. "So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great." (Job 2:13) After that week, though, they felt the need to speak, and said the wrong things. Actually, Job's friends did pretty well. They lasted a whole week. Researchers say that most people feel the urge to speak after only forty-five seconds of silence.

Most often, we say something that is actually hurtful. A baby dies, and someone is sure to say, "God wanted them more than you." Would you walk up to the mother of a kidnapped child and say, "the kidnapper needed him/her more than you"? Somebody else dies, and we tell the survivor, "They are in a better place." Even if the deceased is a Christian, the remaining loved one is only thinking, "but they aren't in *my* place." And if the survivor is a Christian and knows the deceased is not, they may respond, "No, he's not."

A mother learns that her child is developmentally or physically disabled. The parent does not want to hear, "It is God's will," or "God doesn't make mistakes." We aren't ready to hear that God has a plan. It may be years before we are able to see what that plan is; until then, the idea that God has a plan for this child makes God appear cruel and heartless.

We say these things because we don't know what else to say, because we have heard others say them, because we feel the need to speak. Instead of saying something potentially hurtful, why not just hug the

person, and sit with them for a week. Then if you have to say something, you have at least had time to think of something helpful.

The other category of speech may not be immediately hurtful; it may just be inaccurate. If they can be true when the scriptures may say otherwise, then what does the Bible say that is actually wrong? The repetition, rather than the scripture, becomes authoritative.

One group of statements may be a particular example of this. One is the aforementioned, "He's in a better place." Some say "(s)he's gone to be with the Lord," meaning that the person has died. Some athletes say, "I did it for my dad who is looking down at me from heaven." Other than the story in Luke 16, the preponderance of scripture seems to indicate that the dead are in the grave on earth until the end of time. Paul seemed to believe so.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God lead with him....For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thes 4:14, 16-17)

Although verse 14 is sometimes translated that Jesus will "bring" those who died before, it is still ambiguous. To state it as a fact that the dead beat us to heaven could be dangerous.

Perhaps there is no harm in repeating things that may not be quite scriptural. On the other hand, maybe repeating them undermines the authority of the Bible, just as saying hurtful things damages the speaker.

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