

- ***READ I Peter 5:6-9*** I recently watched a video of two grazing animals on the African savannah that were engaged in a tussle. They were so focused on one another that both failed to realize that there was a lion running right towards them ready to make an easy meal out of these animals. One of the grazers was lucky enough to escape, but the not-so-lucky one met his fate because he was not alert and aware of what was going on all around him. Just as there was a lion looking to pounce, overtake, and devour one of these animals, so is Satan lurking around in this life searching for someone of his own to devour.
- Thankfully, the Apostle Peter gives good instructions as to what needs to happen if we want to be able to resist the attacks of the evil one. He writes that we must be sober-minded, alert, and firm in our faiths. If we will be sure to do each of these things, then we can have confidence in our ability, with the Lord's help, to be able to stand strong against the attacks of the devil. However, if we are not strong in our faith, if we are not alert, and if we are not sober-minded then we should expect nothing less than to be totally dominated and overrun by the devil and his negative influences.
- This evening, I would like for us to look at the first of those instructions and come away understanding that the second and third instructions are impossible to achieve if we are not firstly sober-minded. Every single translation that I looked at had some variant of sober-minded within this text. The NASB renders the text "**sober spirit**" while the KJV and NKJV simply implore the reader to be "**sober.**" While the world might take the issue of sobriety very lightly, we as disciples of Jesus must be set apart from that nonsense by very seriously taking the charge of sobriety to heart.
- As we look at the issue of the Christian and Sobriety, we will begin by defining what it means to be sober and why it is important that we be of this type of mindset. We will then look at some substances and conditions that can cause us to fall short of sobriety and how Satan seeks to use those things against us. We will then conclude by looking at three practical things we can do to help those who are afflicted by the issue of insobriety.

To begin with, let's establish this as the working definition for our considerations this evening. **To be sober or to possess sobriety is to be clear and collected in one's spirit. Having the ability to control one's thoughts and actions.**

I. Sobriety is necessary in order to think and do as we ought to think and do.

- A. We have already seen that we must be sober in order to be alert and firmly standing in our faiths if we want to be able to resist the devil, but let's look at some other passages that deal with why we ought to be sober or clear and collected in our spirits and minds. These passages speak directly to our need for sobriety and what it will allow for us to do.
 1. **Sobriety allow us to know and tell the truth. (Acts 26:24,25)** As Paul was giving the defense of his faith to Festus, the governor accuses Paul of being out of his mind. Paul responds to those comments by stating that he is not out of his mind, but that he is sharing words of "**sober truth**" (NASB). The CSB has Paul as stating that he is speaking words of truth and good judgment.
 2. **Sobriety allows us to recognize our sin and stop sinning. (I Corinthians 15:33,34)** Directly following Paul's admonishment concerning bad company corrupting good morals, he rebukes the Corinthians for their sin and tells them that they can stop sinning once they "**become sober-minded**" (NASB). The CSB renders this as Paul's command for them to come to their senses or to sober up so that they can do as they know they ought to do.
 3. **Sobriety allows us to be alert and ready for battle. (I Thessalonians 5:5-9)** This text goes hand in hand with our opening text of **I Peter 5:6-9**. If we are clear thinking then we can see danger coming. The CSB renders both of these instances of sober as "**self-controlled.**"

4. **Sobriety allows us to stand for the truth when things get tough. (II Timothy 2:5)** These words of encouragement were written from Paul to his son in the faith, Timothy, who was facing difficult times in his ministry. Paul instructs him that he must remain sober (NASB) or self-controlled (CSB) if he wants to be able to do his work as an evangelist and fulfill his ministry.
 5. **Sobriety allows us to stay completely focused on Jesus. (I Peter 1:13)** When we are sober, we have the ability to focus our minds on whatever we believe is best to focus on, and there are few, if any, things more important than focusing on Jesus.
 6. **Sobriety allows us to pray to God as we ought to. (I Peter 4:7)** Considering that the end is near, we ought to be a very prayerful people, and we can be so if we are able to think clearly and stay focused on what is most important.
- B. I believe that all of us would agree that each of these things that we are expected to do are important, and it is like-wise important that we recognize them as being strongly joined to the need for sobriety and being sober-minded. If we want to be as God would have us to be then we must have minds that are clearly thinking so they can direct us as we ought to go. This means that we must be aware of different substances or conditions that can cause us to lose our sobriety and self-controlled condition.

II. There are substances and conditions in life that can cause us to lose our ability to think clearly.

A. alcohol

1. The Bible clearly depicts the overindulgence of alcohol as being a trespass against God's will for us as His people.
 - a) Drunkenness is included in the works of the flesh that will lead to someone not being able to inherit the kingdom of God. **(Galatians 5:19-21)**
 - b) Drunkenness is described as a deed of darkness and desire of the flesh in **Romans 13:11-13**.
 - c) Many different levels and forms of alcohol consumption are condemned in **I Peter 4:1-3** as sinful desires that are against God's will.
2. There is simply no good argument that can be made in favor of drunkenness being something that God approves of and delights in from His people. One of the reasons this is the case is because drunkenness leaves us in a state where we are almost always prohibited from functioning properly and doing as we ought to do. A couple clear examples of this being the case can we found within the lives of Noah and Lot.
 - a) Noah allowed for himself to get drunk to the point that he was naked and in a compromised position within his tent, and his youngest son came into his tent and saw his naked body. This led to Ham being cursed. **(Genesis 9:18-25)**
 - b) Lot also got drunk, and his daughters took advantage of his drunken stupor by committing incest with him so that they might become pregnant. **(Genesis 19:30-38)**

B. drugs (illicit & prescription)

1. While the Bible does not specifically address the issue of drugs, we must acknowledge that illicit drug use is becoming or already is an epidemic in our society. Even just recently I heard of a young man in one of the local school systems that came to school under the influence of something and assaulted multiple students before getting tased and arrested. More than likely, that kid had no clue what he was doing because he was high on mind-altering drugs.
2. We might often think of this being an issue only with street drugs such as cocaine, meth, ecstasy, heroin, and many many more, but we need to be aware that people of all ages are now abusing drugs that are perfectly legal to purchase over the counter. The number of overdose deaths is easily at an all-time high, and it is mostly because of people looking for an escape, which we will address in just a few moments.

C. uncontrolled emotions

1. While we might not think about emotions as being something that affects our sobriety, we need to recognize the possibility that our unbridled emotions can cause us to do things that we might not normally do. Emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, jealousy, and lust can easily cloud our judgment to the point that we think, say, and do things that we would not decide to do under normal circumstances.
2. These truths can be seen even in the Bible. Consider how Saul's uncontrolled jealousy of David caused him to seek to kill God's anointed king of Israel. **(I Samuel 19-24)** Consider how David's uncontrolled lust caused him to take a woman who was not his wife and eventually have him killed. **(II Samuel 11-12)** Consider how Judas's sadness at his decision to betray Jesus led him to take his own life...something that he would've never done under normal circumstances. **(Matthew 27:3-5)** Consider how Peter's fear caused him to deny Jesus as his Lord and even curse those who were asking him. **(Matthew 26:69-75)** They might not be operate exactly the same as the other substances we have highlighted, but our emotions must be controlled just like anything else or we will possibly find ourselves in a world of trouble for failing to be soberly-minded.

III. The devil uses these as his tools to keep us from being self-controlled, sober, & able to resist his evil influences.

- A. From the examples I just gave, what better way to cause someone to hurt another person, to lose all inhibitions, to take one's own life, or to flat out deny Jesus as Lord than to put a person into a state where they have little to no control over what they are think and/or doing. When we put ourselves into situations where we are not in control of ourselves then we are only inviting Satan to do with us as he wishes.
- B. There is a reason why there are so many warnings in the Bible about the need for sobriety and self-control. When we are in those states then we are able to be aware of the temptations that are before us. When we are clearly thinking then we are able to look for those ways of escape that our loving Father provides for us. **(I Corinthians 10:13)** We are able to rightly evaluate the situation and make the best decision possible that will preserve our holiness and righteousness, but when we are inebriated...we lose nearly all of our ability to make those decisions that will preserve our purity before God. Far too many deaths and other life-altering situations take place because people simply weren't able to fully consider the ramifications of their decisions because they were not fully in control of their thoughts and actions because they had allowed for themselves to be put under the influence of some sort of mind-altering substance.

IV. He draws us in by deceiving us into thinking that these are appropriate means of coping with life's difficulties.

- A. While most of these things have a proper use in one way or another, the devil wants for us to abuse them in order to have an easier time accomplishing his will within our lives. He wants for us go beyond those uses that might be appropriate such as the medicinal use of alcohol and/or prescription drugs. He wants for us to overindulge ourselves, abuse, and misuse these things so that we might be opened up to his influences through our insobriety. **(Proverbs 23:9-11)** He wants us to think that we need these things in order to escape from the difficulties of life and find happiness, but this couldn't be further from the truth! When we resort to these types of substances as our mechanism for coping with life's difficulties, we will quickly find out that they simply invite more difficulties into our lives. In no text is this more clear than in the writings of **Proverbs 23:29-35**.

"Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has conflicts? Who has complaints? Who has wounds for no reason? Who has red eyes? Those who linger over wine; those who go looking for mixed wine. Don't gaze at wine because it is red, because it gleams in the cup and goes

down smoothly. **In the end it bites like a snake and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and you will say absurd things.** You'll be like someone sleeping out at sea or lying down on the top of a ship's mast. *"They struck me, but I feel no pain! They beat me, but I didn't know it! When will I wake up? I'll look for another drink."*

- B. We might think that we are finding a proper escape from the difficulties of this world, but we are only allowing ourselves to get caught up in a vicious cycle of struggles and pains when we allow for our sobriety to be taken away from us by becoming enslaved to mind-altering substances. We would all do well to not even take that first step into insobriety, but what about those who have already gotten caught up in such a lifestyle and activities or are heavily tempted to do so?

V. What can be done to help those who are afflicted with struggles with a lack of self-control & insobriety?

A. The afflicted need to see God as their true refuge in this difficult life.

1. Because of nature as a depressant, many people see the consumption of alcohol as a way to relax when life becomes difficult. However, these people completely miss the fact that alcohol used in this manner is extremely dangerous and often leads to more troubles for the individual than they began with. According to addictioncenter.com, *"Alcohol can depress the central nervous system so much that it results in impairment such as slurred speech, unsteady movement, disturbed perceptions, and an inability to react quickly. Mentally, alcohol reduces an individual's ability to think rationally, lessens inhibitions, and distorts judgment. If an individual consumes too much alcohol too rapidly, they can depress the central nervous system to a point of respiratory failure, coma, or death."*
2. If alcohol and other stimulants and depressants are not the keys to finding peace, then how can we cope with the difficulties of this life? I would suggest two passages out of the Psalms to answer this question, and they both center around the reality that only in the Lord and having faith & trust in Him can we be able to cope with the difficulties of this life in a way that won't lead to further harm.
 - a) *"Lord, I seek refuge in you; let me never be disgraced. Save me by your righteousness. Listen closely to me; rescue me quickly. Be a rock of refuge for me, a mountain fortress to save me. For you are my rock and my fortress; you lead and guide me for your name's sake. You will free me from the net that is secretly set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I entrust my spirit; you have redeemed me, Lord, God of truth."* (Psalm 31:1-5)
 - b) *"God is our refuge and strength a helper who is always found in times of trouble. Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth trembles and the mountains topple into the depths of the seas, though its water roars and foams and the mountains quake with its turmoil."* (Psalm 46:1-3)

B. We as disciples need to create a culture where the afflicted feel safe to be honest with their struggles.

1. I was recently speaking with a friend who has been attending AA meetings over the past few months, and he shared a story with me that is quite sad. He said that after attending the meeting with his son, his son looked at him and told him that the meeting was along like church. He said it was a lot like church except for one thing: Everyone was being real and honest. Friends...if that doesn't punch you in the gut then I don't know what will.
2. What this tells me is that all of us, as God's people, need to do a better job of putting away our facades of a perfect life and be more willing and open to admitting when life just isn't all that great. We need to be willing to talk about our struggles, but that will only happen when we create a culture that invites people to do such a thing.

3. For too long, our churches have been places where people are afraid to admit their shortcomings and struggles because they fear the judgment and ridicule of their brothers and sisters. We **MUST** be better than that. We must be loving, patient, and compassionate with those who are struggling because there isn't a one of us here who isn't fighting some kind of the devil's demons in our lives. We must be the type of people that are inviting others to seek our help because doing so allows for us to show the compassion of Christ living in us. Further, it allows for us to fulfill Paul's instructions to seek to carry one another's burdens while restoring those who are overcome with sin. **(Galatians 6:1,2)** Yes, we must stand firmly on the truth when the time presents itself, but we must also stand on that truth in love and be ready to pick up our hurting brothers and sisters when they are overcome by the devil's attacks. We are the place where people should be able to turn when they wanted to be spiritually helped.
- C. We need to take advantage of the expertise of those who deal with these issues professionally.**
1. Finally, we need to recognize our limitations as a local church. We are a spiritual institution. We are here to help any and all who seek to rid their lives of sin so that they might be what Jesus would have them to be. We should never turn away those who seek to make their lives right.
 2. However, there are emotional, mental, and physical aspects of the battle that many have with alcohol, drug, and even emotions that we simply are not equipped to deal with because of our nature as a spiritual institution. We can help hold each other accountable and work through things from a spiritual perspective, but we simply weren't designed to deal with some of these issues. It is at those moments that we would do well to take advantage of the expertise of organization such as Alcoholics Anonymous and especially the work being done by some brothers & sisters in Christ who deal with these issues professionally through their organization called "Leaving The Pit."

Bottom line is this: Insobriety is a life destroyer, and Satan's work and influence will eventually catch up with those who fell to control themselves in this regard. May we become a people who are fully committed to sobriety so that we can resist the attacks of Satan, and may we only go to God when we need refuge from the difficulties of this life. And may we also be a people who are ready to wrap our arms around those who come looking for the deliverance and strength that God seeks to provide to us in our struggles in this life.