

Session 4

February 3, 2019

WHEN SUBSTANCES TAKE OVER

Ephesians 5:15-21

I remember the old bubble bath commercial on TV. “The traffic...the boss...the baby...the dog!” a modern woman lament. Then throwing up her hands, she cries out, “Calgon, take me away!” Her escape? Falling into a luxurious bathtub brimming with bubbles, promising softly pampered skin and freshly calmed nerves. While the stresses of life have not changed much, the stress-relief certainly has, as record numbers of people depend on drugs and alcohol to “take them away.” Consider a few fast facts:

- 61% of students have consumed alcohol by the end of high school
- 46% of high school seniors have been drunk at least once in their life
- Nearly half of college students use illicit drugs
- Marijuana use is at a 30-year high among college students
- One of every three high school seniors have smoked marijuana
- Recreational marijuana use is now legal in 10 states; medical marijuana is legal in 33 (including our own Florida)
- The fastest growing segment of marijuana users today is *senior adults!*

Add other categories of illicit drugs (not to mention nicotine and abused prescription drugs) and it's clear that our country is in a crisis. God's plan has never included immunity from the stresses of life. He told His disciples, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). But rather than turning us to illicit substances to escape our troubles, Jesus concluded that verse by saying, “But take heart; I have overcome the world.” In our focal passage, Paul gives some hints on how to “take heart” when facing difficulties. Three key words stand out.

Attention (vv. 15-17). “Careful attention” in verse 15 carries the idea of “strict” attention. It's not so much an outward concern (worrying about what others will think), but an inward focus; an intentional, purposeful, disciplined lifestyle. Paul describes this “circumspect” walk of faith as (a) one of wisdom (v. 15), in contrast to that of the unwise, who squander both time and opportunities that could be used for His kingdom work; (b) one of urgency (v. 16), dedicated to reclaiming the time lost to past frivolity and mindful of the rapid passing of this life; and (3) one of discernment (v. 17); careful to understand and embrace God's will rather than man's.

Activity (vv. 18-20). As with everything in the Christian walk, it's not enough simply to know something. Knowledge must be backed up with application. Careful attention must be backed up with careful activity. While verse 18 is most often used as a prohibition to drinking alcohol, the emphasis of these verses is *control*; not of one's drinking, but of one's behavior. To be drunk with wine is to allow alcohol to affect (and ultimately control) everything a person does. The application is two-fold: (1) do NOT be controlled by any foreign substance, person, or thing and (2) DO be controlled utterly, completely, and continually by God's Holy Spirit. The list of activities associated with the Spirit-filled life is both evidence of God's control, and a means to it. While each of the terms has its own nuance of meaning, the list is best taken as a whole. Believers filled with the Holy Spirit will be overflowing with Holy Spirit induced exuberance!

Accountability (v. 21). With private exuberance comes interpersonal propriety. To be controlled by the Spirit personally is never license to be out of control relationally. The idea of submission is not meant to highlight weakness, but rather to maintain order. The general command in this verse is to subject oneself appropriately to the body of Christ, in honor of Christ. The verses that follow will give examples of appropriate submission in specific relationships: wives to their husbands (5:22); children to their parents (6:1); and servants to their masters (6: 5).

- **Ephesians 5:15-17.** Walk wisely.
- **Ephesians 5:18.** Live under the control of the Holy Spirit, not the control of anything else.
- The passage specifically refers to wine but broaden the scope to anything that can control us, such as recreational drugs or the abuse of prescription drugs.
- **Ephesians 5:19-21.** Let the control of the Holy Spirit govern how you live and act.