

Under the Influence

Our culture finds a lot of humor in drunk people. We can all name movies where alcohol played a major part in the plot. You don't have to see the movie *The Hangover* (or its sequels) to know this comedy is built on drunk behavior. And Lee Marvin won an Oscar for his humorous role as a drunk gunfighter in *Cat Ballou*. (His drunk horse should've won too.)



The humor rises out of people doing things they normally wouldn't do. They step out of character. And a lot of them think their own behavior is funny—and laudable. Ever heard someone say with a sense of pride: "I got so wasted last night."

Unfortunately, a lot of darkness also rises. A lot of people turn to alcohol as the answer to their problems, but the abuse of alcohol is the cause of a lot of problems.

The humor, the darkness, or however the behavior manifests itself happens because people willingly give up control. And this applies to any substance we willingly surrender control to: recreational drugs, abuse of prescription drugs, whatever.

While the Bible warns against the use of alcohol, it does not prohibit its use. What Scripture prohibits is drunkenness.

"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

What's the big deal? Living "under the influence" is giving control of your actions and thoughts to something else. Nothing good or beneficial ever happens in a drunken state. A person under the influence may feel numbed from a problem, but it doesn't take the problem away.

With the majority of my readers, I realize I am "preaching to the choir," so let me turn the tables and make this keenly specific to all followers of Christ—whether you drink or not.

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul placed wine and the Holy Spirit in opposite corners. In this juxtaposition, Paul told us to be

filled with one and not the other. And none of this is optional. We clearly see the command about not getting drunk, but right next to it is another command: be filled with the Spirit. That means:

It is just as wrong not to be filled with the Spirit as it is wrong to be drunk.

- A Bible study leader would immediately be removed from his role if he showed up drunk, but how many teachers rely on themselves instead of being filled with the Spirit?
- No one would last in church leadership if he or she arrived drunk, but how many of us come to a business meeting, deacon meeting, or committee meeting without first submitting ourselves to the lordship of Christ and the control of His Holy Spirit?

Too many of us can all tell sad tales of church fights and church splits. I would venture none of those stories involve drunk behavior, but they all involve people who were not surrendered to the presence, power, and filling of the Holy Spirit. And that is just as wrong.

So before we rant about people acting drunk, let's examine our own lives and make sure we're not acting apart from the control of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the vine is manifested in changed behavior, but it's never to our benefit. The fruit of the Spirit also leads to changed behavior, and it is nothing but beneficial.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal. 5:22-23).

So if you're thirsty, be filled with Spirit.

Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive (John 7:37-39).

