

Maker's Mark

The True Identity of the Sober-Minded

June 9, 2024

Today we're making sure we're bearing our Marker's mark of mercy!



So, **how do others identify you as one of God's people?** I mean, **how do you demonstrate God's power?** Well, *firstly*, Peter advises to just ...



Be *done* with *all* *deceit*, *hypocrisy*, *jealousy*, and *all unkind* speech. [In other words] ... *Grow into a full experience of salvation*. [Your identity becomes obvious when you begin growing out of *deceit*, *hypocrisy*, *jealousy*, and all *unkind* speech; and grow you must] ... For you are a *chosen people*. You are *royal priests* ... a *holy nation* ... [So act like it! And] *show others the goodness of God*, for *He called you out of the darkness* [of *deceit*, *hypocrisy*, *jealousy*, and all *unkind* speech] *into His wonderful light*. [So grow! Because *that's your Maker's mark!*] Once you had *no identity* as a people; now you are *God's people*. ... [Because] now you have received *God's mercy* ... *so that we* [as God's people] can be *dead to* [the] *sin* [of *deceit*, *hypocrisy*, *jealousy*, and all *unkind* speech] and *live for what is right*. – 1 Peter 2:1-2, 9-10, 24 NLT



So, what's the *best* way to *display* our *identity* to the *world*? "Show 'em the *goodness* of God". Which is *one* of the *fruit* of the *Spirit*. And **fruit is indisputable evidence of a tree's true identity. And a believers.** "You'll know 'em by their fruit!" (Mt 7:16) And I chose a *booze bottle* as a *background*, because of a *warning* to which we should pay more *attention*.

Do not get *drunk* with *wine* [though the *fruit* of the *grape* "*gladdens the heart*", according to Psalm 104:15; and *causes* many to become *temporarily open* and *honest* and "*confessy*" and *kind*] ... but [do] *be filled with the* [fruit of the] *Spirit* – Ephesians 5:18 ESV

Which has an everlasting heart-gladdening effect of *love*, *joy*, *peace*, *patience*, *kindness*, *goodness*, and *the like*. And **the booze and the Spirit are compared cuz they're similar.** Exhibit A:

[On] the day of Pentecost ... all of [the disciples] were [so] *filled with the Holy Spirit* ... [that] [Some] said, "*They have had too much wine*." Then Peter [said] ... "*These men are not drunk*, as you *suppose*. It's only *nine* in the *morning!*" – Acts 2:1-15 NIV



Which only gets *funnier* the more you *think* about it. Because, *in* their *defense*, Peter *doesn't* say, "*These men don't drink!*" But, "*It's only 9:00 in the morning!*" Be that as it *may*, the point we need to *ponder* is, how *those* around *us* would *respond* if we "*lived for what is right*" like we had "*a full experience*" of being "*filled with the* [fruit of the] *Spirit*".



Exhibit B: On the way to Whistler, I was given a *roadside sobriety test*, after "*showing the goodness*" to a *cop*. Oh, Canada.

I told you about my *patience-training exercises* (consciously practicing fully trusting God and loving others in short bursts). Well, during my training, I drove to Whistler with my adult son. So, when I was pulled over, just as we arrived, **I was determined to set a good example – to be gracious and joyful and grateful – you know the “full experience”** come what may. See what’s coming?

So, this *no-nonsense policeman* approaches and says, “Know what you were doing?” And I say, “I assume I was speeding? But I wasn’t paying attention, which makes it even worse. So I’m good with getting whatever I deserve.” And I hand him my license, insurance, and registration, and I smile.

And he leans down, sniffs, and says, “Is there alcohol in the car?” I say, “No”, and he says, “You sure?” I say, “You can look if you’d like.” He says, “Have you been drinking?!” “No.” “Not even a beer?” “Nope.” And he says, “I can smell it.” I say, “But I haven’t.” And he says, “Then you won’t mind taking a sobriety test.” And I say, “Not at all; I’d enjoy seeing how the process works.” So he’s reciting a warning and confirming I’m voluntarily agreeing. And I say “Yes. Of course. Whatever you need.” And he turns and says, “You haven’t had anything to drink?” And I said, “Nothin’!” Trust me, this is way funnier in hindsight. So I do the nose-touching, and the line-walking, and then I blow into this device, that goes “deeeeeeeep”. A lot of you probably know about this; but it was new to me. And he holds it up for both of us to see. And it goes “deeeep-deeeep-deeeep” and then flashes “0.0”. And then he’s all smiles and apologies.

And then he wrote me up for \$113 for 14 mph over. And that almost threw me; cuz I thought I was off the hook! But I kept my composure, took the ticket, thanked him, and said, “I’ll pay it with pleasure; and pay more attention to my speedometer.” And He just soberly shook his head and said, “Wow.” Now, I can only behave like that in determined bursts of training. And with my son there, I had an added incentive. But in the end, **all I did was to not stop living like I’m trusting God and loving that cop.** And it blew his mind! Turns out, **fully displaying the identity mark of the mercy we’ve received is jarring.** And really fun.

That confused cop probably never pulled over a believer who behaved like such a ... believer. So he could only conclude that something was up. So much so, he thought he could smell it! But it was just **the aroma of life, which packs a powerful punch!** That poor policeman couldn’t peg the identity of a person so incongruous with the ways of this world.



I told you that almost every conflict between the religious and Jesus was over **dietary restrictions**, and **holy days**, and **circumcision**. And in his commentary on Romans, James Dunn notes, that in Paul’s day, the vast majority of rabbinical writings concerned these three areas of the law – and he goes on to explain that for the Jews, these were the **“boundary markers”** that set them apart. Sociologists call them **“identity markers”**. Either way, they’re just **relatively superficial, highly visible, cues to categorize who’s in a group from who’s out.** And every group has ‘em! Consider the Hell’s Angels. What’s their collective color of clothing? Black. Beverage of choice? Beer. Type of women? Biker chick! You see? **Superficial, highly visible, identity markers.** And every gang, from Hells Angels to Missouri Synod Lutherans (the gang I was in) has a unique set. Know why? **For the shallow sense of security that I’m in the group!**



Whatever *group* we're a *part* of, we want to know how to *tell* who's *in* from who's *out* – but *mostly* so we can know that we're definitely *in*. Which is likely why **every group considers their markers so sacred**. Which is sadly why many forfeit the reassurance of a living faith of growing into a full experience of showing God's goodness, for misleading measuring marks, like: how they **vote**, or **dress**, or **drink**, or **don't**, or **smoke**, or **don't**, or approve of **tattoos**, or whatever. But we're called to:

Be alert and of sober mind ... standing firm in the faith – 1 Peter 5:7-9 NIV

Because, **you can't stand firm on a superficial foundation**. Gotta dig down deep, like Jesus says, and build on the Rock, like Jesus is! **Until we're so sober-minded we seem a bit stoned!** You know the Scripture:

Do not conform any longer to the *pattern* of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing* of your *mind*. ... [Did you know it goes on to say to] think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. – Romans 12:2-3 NIV

How do we measure faith? Not with random identity-markers like the religious rulers' top three: what they ate, what they celebrate, and what was under their tunic! Leave all that to the legalistic!

You are all children of the light [cuz we "walk in the Light" (1 Jn 1:7)] and children of the day. [Cuz Jesus said, "As long as it is day ... I am the light" (Jn 9:4-5)] ... [So] be awake and sober. ... [For] those who get drunk, get drunk at night. [Cuz they stumble in the dark] But since we belong to the [light of] day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of ["a full experience of" (1 Pet 2:2)] salvation as a helmet. – 1 Thess. 5:5-9 NIV



Because, **it's a battle to display our Maker's mark of mercy as our true identity!** You need markers? Try "faith" and "hope" and "love"! In that order, from Paul's order in his "love chapter". (1 Cor 13) So, **how can people see our true identity?** Well, here's what Jesus said:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you ... [and] By this all will know that you are My disciples" – John 13:34-35 NKJ

[And] This commandment [to love] we have from Him [who said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (Jn 16:33)] ... And His commandments [to display His love] are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. [With love!] And this is the victory that has overcome the world—[and this is how we rightly measure] our faith. – 1 John 4:21-5:4 ESV

So, **prepare for battle and then light up the world by loving others like you're feelin' no pain!** Because, the more we resist actually growing in a full experience of salvation, that steadily makes us truly different from the world, the more **we'll find visible ways to act different, so we'll feel less guilt for not really being different**. And that's self-deception at its worst. And that's what's at the core of legalism – propping ourselves up with superficial identity markers, rather than **allowing our Maker's mark of mercy to truly transform our heart**.

Because, **every believer knows we're supposed to be growing in loving like Jesus**. So I guess the thinking is: **if we can't be identified by our love, let's at least be weird**. Which is why the vain religion of the Pharisees was so toxic. They weren't "growing into a full experience of salvation"; they were just being weird. And to their chagrin Jesus called 'em on it, *publically, again and again!* "You're like *beautiful whitewashed tombs, full of putrid rot!*" (Mt 23:27) "You sift out a gnat and then swallow a camel!" (Mt 23:24) "You pick at a speck in a brother's eye, while a plank hangs out of your own!" (Mt 7:3, Lk 6:41) That's a big part of why they killed Him.

Pharisees' energies go into limited identities. Whereas **Jesus is all about living a full experience of showing God's goodness**. And Jesus identified everyone by the direction they were heading, whether toward or away from trusting our Father and loving our neighbors in ever-increasing measures. Which is why He warned those, with every religious identity mark of His day, that:

"The prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you." – Matthew 21:31 NIV

How do you suppose *that* went over? They said, "He's a drunkard and a friend of sinners!" (Lk 7:34) They could smell it on Him! But the poor people who'd been made to feel a million miles from God, suddenly found – or were found by – **a Shepherd who was actually, genuinely, authentically, holy without being weird! And He loved them, and invited them to enter His presence, experience His power, and share His joy**. So, if we must have identity markers, let's:

Be alert and of sober mind ... [and] love each other deeply ... [and] use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace ... [And] If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. – 1 Peter 4:7-11 NIV

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, [because they don't like what they think they smell] and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. [Because they know life when they smell it] ... For we are not, as so many, peddling the Word of God; but as of sincerity – 2 Corinthians 2:15-17 NKJ

Because **that kind of love is truly intoxicating**. One of the big reasons God allows our troubles in this world, is to allow us to display the power of the peace and joy that can only come from trusting Him and loving them. So then, **how much of that power are you displaying?** Because, *that's our faith!* And *that's what overcomes this world*.

Can you imagine what would happen if we all had a simultaneous training session! I say we pick a day: tomorrow, from 1:00-3:00 (in the afternoon, not the morning), and make a united, concerted effort to display "a full experience" to our unsuspecting friends and family and coworkers, come what may. **So, set yourself a notification, and text each other reminders**. And let's see who the Lord sets up for a great story! You can do it! It's only two hours.

But, **whatever you do, don't settle for superficial transformation**.

Keep going and growing till you're blue alert and loving and sober-minded, they can smell it on you! Even if they can't identify exactly what it is. Cuz, if you stay true, they'll eventually have to ask.