

# Word Study SOBRIETY

(Ian S Davidson, Motherwell)

I always like to read Paul's epistle to Titus. It contains one of my favourite passages of Scripture: **"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."** (2:11-14) I once spoke on this passage at a church social gathering and have never forgotten it. I think a book could be written on these four verses alone, never mind the complete letter.

## LIVE SOBERLY

Sobriety, righteousness and godliness have to do with living rightly in relation to ourselves, to others, and to God. Of course, I used to think, as a young Christian, that sobriety was but the antonym of drunkenness. I could not have been more wrong. The word has a far wider meaning. The Greek for soberly is *sophronos* and denotes 'of sound mind'. Vine says that the word, 'suggests the exercise of that self-restraint that governs all passions and desires, enabling the believer to be conformed to the mind of Christ'. Albert Barnes comments: 'It is to have desires and passions well regulated or under proper control'. Adam Clarke writes that the word means, 'having every temper, appetite, and desire, under the government of the Spirit of God'.

Walter Scott was a contemporary of Alexander Campbell. He too came from the Old World. He was born in Moffat, Scotland and educated at Edinburgh University. He turned out to be an outstanding gospel preacher in the United States of America. *The Messiahship* was one of the few books he published in his lifetime. In it, he writes about 'sobriety'. He says: 'Sobriety has respect to ourselves. It means personal purity, personal holiness, or any other thing embraced in keeping our body intact – unstained by evil, drunkenness, tobacco, licentiousness, opium. Also in keeping our souls from lusts, murder, avarice, resentments, the love of pleasure, and whatever defiles the man and mars the beauty and symmetry of his character. And the deep wisdom of our blessed Lord should be carefully noted and remembered here, namely: **"that it is not that which goes into a man that defiles him, but that which comes out of him that defiles a man; for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies – these are the things that defile the man."** (Matthew: 15:19). How glorious it is in a man to preserve both body and soul intact, pure, holy, and to superintend his character as it works toward perfection! Please note the following additional passages:

- **"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith."** (Romans 12:3);
- **"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which become women professing godliness) with good works."** (1 Timothy 2:9,10);

- **"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach..."** (1 Timothy 3:2);
- **"That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience."** (Titus 2:2);
- **"That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children."** (Titus 2:5);
- **"But the end of all things is at hand: be you therefore sober and watch unto prayer."** (1 Peter 4:7).



## DRINK AND DRUG ABUSE

I like what Walter Scott wrote on this subject. He includes drunkenness and opium or drugs in the things to be avoided. Drunkenness and drug taking do not equate with 'soundness of mind'. Drunkenness is serious problem in the modern world. Some people treat it as a laugh, but it is certainly no joke. A word with the police, paramedics, battered wives, etc. will prove the point.

Binge drinking, especially among young people, is now at epidemic proportions in Britain. The statistics are frightening. 1 in 13 people in Britain is dependent upon alcohol. 37% of young men and 23% of young women binge-drink regularly. 1 in 4 beds in male hospital wards is occupied by someone with an alcohol-related illness. 10 people a week are killed as a result of drink driving. The social and financial consequences of these figures are incalculable. And it is getting worse every year. No wonder God's word has always condemned drunkenness. In fact, Paul saw it as a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:21). The great apostle once pointed out to the Corinthians that drunkards, among many others, **"will not inherit the kingdom of God."** (1 Corinthians 6: 10). God's word could not be clearer on the matter.

Drug abuse is also on the increase in the Western World. Many countries are virtually at war with the organised drug gangs. The latter only care about money and think nothing of the destruction they are bringing to individuals, families, towns, villages, etc. Governments are finding it increasingly difficult to overcome the world's drug traffickers. Bribery, violence and corruption are the traffickers' stock-in-trade. I once did a special study on drugs. I read about the effects of cocaine (also known as "snow" or "coke"); heroin ("junk" or "dope"); LSD (which stands for lysergic acid diethylamide); cannabis ("pot" or "grass" or "weed"); amphetamines ("speed"); barbiturates, etc. Why people experiment with such substances is beyond me. I recently read an interview with Al Jardine, an ex-Beach Boy. He said of the past: 'Everyone was high but me. I was the only one who didn't take drugs. I was the square...' I admire him for that. It's never easy being the odd one out. Francis Schaeffer once quoted a verse from an anonymous poem. It reads:

*King Heroin is my shepherd, I shall always want,  
He maketh me to lie down in the gutters.  
He leadeth me beside the troubled waters.  
He destroyeth my soul.*

Schaeffer went on to say: 'Playing with drugs is foolish, as well as wrong.' I could not have put it better myself.



## ONE FINAL POINT.

I note that some books talk about the saints of God being 'intoxicated by the Spirit'. This, frankly, is nonsense. People can be intoxicated by the spirit of the bottle, but not by the Spirit of God. The word "toxic" refers to poison. The Holy Spirit does not poison us, He cleanses us. He also helps us to 'live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world'.