

## 5: From Drunkard To Counselor

Now we want to turn to a very important passage of Scripture. It is, perhaps, the most significant passage of Scripture as it relates to you and me. We're involved in this passage! As you read it again, imagine yourself involved in this setting. I refer to Revelation 14:6 and on. Notice:

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

God declares that there will be a message that will sweep the world. This message is called the 'everlasting gospel'. Not some new concept of religious thinking, but rather a message that is of old, of everlasting - from the beginning of time. The gospel is the power of God to save men and women.

With this in mind, I'd like to share with you an experience that has dramatically shown me the power of God on the human heart. This individual was once a Christian, but, as you will see lost her way as the result of a number of influences that were introduced into her life. At the age of six she was introduced to the use of snuff. The vice became firmly established and held her in its grip. In her 'teens she started to use alcohol. This, too, became a well-established habit.

Somewhere along the line she came to know the Sabbath-keeping people and united with the church. For a short time she gave up both the use of snuff and the use of alcohol, and then just as suddenly she went back to her old habits. For years and years she remained a member of the church although she continued the use of these soul and body-defiling habits. The church members, however, knew nothing of her habits. You can just imagine the guilt that she carried all these years. Often she heard the pastor speak on the glorious return of Jesus. She heard 1 John 3:3 repeated on many occasions, And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure; and had been reminded that those looking forward to the coming of Jesus will endeavor to purify themselves and leave off these habits. One can only imagine the guilt and remorse this dear soul must have suffered through the years.

Finally, one Sabbath morning, she heard a sermon that impressed her. She felt that deep desire to cut loose from these habits and not knowing what else to do, she telephoned the pastor. He was a young man. She asked him to come over to her home and visit about a problem she had. He responded immediately and soon found himself listening to a story the like of which he had never heard. She told him of her habits and the grip they had on her. She confessed that she was a drunkard and although she had tried many methods, nothing seemed to be able to give her victory. "I have now come to the place where I must have victory, and I want you to help me," she said in anguish of spirit.

The young man was shocked. He never realized that she could be involved in anything like that. She was faithful in attendance at services and active in many ways.

He told her he didn't know what he could do for her, but said he would talk to the church board about it and see what they might suggest. Think of it! A snuff-dipper and a drunkard on the church roles! He could hardly believe his ears. But there was no doubt in his mind since she had told him in very plain language.

The matter was brought up at the next church board meeting and they helped her alright -- right out of the church! Invariably when there is an inability to help a person up, he is helped out. The Bible makes it very plain that there is a time when a person ought to be disfellowshipped. But equally as plain is the instruction that this is to be resorted to only when all other methods for restoration fail. Galatians 6:1, 2 tells us that if a brother be found straying from the path, the spiritual members of the church are to go to the erring one and endeavor to restore that one. Criticism will never be a part of that restorative

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process. Faultfinding and judging of motives is foreign to the program the Lord has designed for the restoration of erring members of the church. If I find some brother that is straying from the path of right, if I'm spiritual, I will go and talk to him about it and keep our conversation confidential. This is very important, as well as being scriptural. Notice the words of Proverbs 25:9, "Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another."

Jesus Himself counsels that this ought to be done "alone" with the party involved. We are under a solemn oath to keep the confidence of the one with whom we are discussing a problem. No one else need be brought into it. James 5:20 tells us that this procedure will "...cover a multitude of sins." This method is divinely ordained to be the way to deal with the erring in the flock. Galatians 6:1, 2 also indicate that the one going to help another must go in the spirit of meekness. Humility, the third horizontal level down, will characterize my every action. I will not then condemn, but rather, I will let him know that I, too, have failed, but that there is hope and victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the 'gospel way'!

In this case the church board had no knowledge of this woman's activities outside church. She had told the pastor; he told the church board; from there it went to church business meeting, where she was disfellowshipped.

Some time later we came to that city to hold a series of meetings. As the pastor was looking over a list of names to whom invitations might be sent, he noticed her name and decided she might just appreciate an invitation. For the sake of identification, we will call her Bertha. This is not her real name, of course. He hesitated just a bit when he thought of the trouble he had already had with her, and thought that perhaps he might just as well pass her name by - but then, he thought, the meetings might just do her some good. So an invitation was sent to her.

Believe it or not, she came! She came to the opening Friday night service and was back again to the Sabbath morning and afternoon service. On Sunday night I invited anyone who wanted deliverance from any habit or anyone who would like to have special prayer for any problem to meet me in the wing of the church after the service. Bertha George stayed and met with a few others at the appointed place. We passed out some prayer cards on which provision was made for those who wanted deliverance from tobacco and alcohol to indicate it. There were several squares that could be checked. Bertha checked only the one that said she wanted to be a better Christian.

The reason she didn't check the squares indicating a desire to have help with alcohol and tobacco was that she had already been indicted and sentenced on those before. She didn't feel like admitting it again.

So many feel that very same way. They are unwilling to admit their failings because they're afraid of being helped 'out' instead of being helped 'up'. The counsel is, "...ye which are spiritual, restore such an one..." This is a command of God! Our commission is not to criticize or embarrass anyone. We cannot afford to indict or judge a soul if we expect to be of any help. The only time the Lord can use us to be of help to a needy heart is if we are willing to come in humility and recognize that we too, have failed and have needed the grace of God to rise above a temptation. When we can attest to victory and give the positive assurance that we believe that God will display His power in behalf of the needy one, only then are we ready to offer our services.

Some time after I had been pastoring, I was asked to pastor a certain church that was noted for their problems. It wasn't long after I arrived that I realized that the reputation was well deserved. I wrote to the conference president and told him that I thought there were certain people that needed to be dealt with. He knew what I meant. He wrote back a very nice letter but asked me what we were trying to do; were we trying to help these troublesome people 'up' or 'out' of the church. This question made such an

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impression on me, I never forgot it. I realized that there was a very real difference, and I asked the Lord to keep me ever sensitive to the need and to help me to be able to help people 'up' along the pathway of life. The everlasting gospel has, as an integral part of its message, the desire to help - a message of healing for needy, broken and hurt hearts. That's the message we preach - that's the message we've been commissioned to carry.

When the after-service was over and the people had gone home, the pastor and I looked over the cards. When we came to the card bearing Bertha George's name, the pastor stopped and told me the story I have just related. I suggested that we go and visit with her. He was somewhat reluctant because he didn't want to get into any more trouble, but after discussing the situation, he agreed that it might be well if we did go and pay her a visit. And so in the morning we made our way to the home of Bertha George.

We rang the door-bell and in just a moment she stood at the door and invited us in. That conversation lives in my memory as though it took place only yesterday. The first thing I did was smile and say, "Sister George, we haven't come here to scold you." As I looked her in the eyes, I could see a visible sigh of relief. She began to relax when she realized that we hadn't come to condemn or embarrass her. However, she undoubtedly expected to be berated and scolded, for this is what had happened before. This is what those naming the name of Christ had done the last time they had called. God forgive such! Oh, that we could learn the approach Jesus used and find the success He found.

I felt impressed to continue in this vein of thought. I said, "We've come to help you, because we love you as a Christian. Now suppose you had been involved in an automobile accident and had lost a lot of blood. And suppose the doctor came in and examined you over very carefully. Is it reasonable," I said, "that he would stand by your bedside and scold you for having lost so much blood?"

She looked at me and in her timid way smiled as she shook her head, "No". She seemed to be unable to believe her ears; to think that here were two people who were not going to scold her for having been a slave to these terrible habits for so many years. "No," she said, "I don't suppose he would."

"What do you suppose he would do," I asked. She was a registered nurse and I knew she would know.

"I think," she said, "that he would order a transfusion."

The moment I heard her say that, I felt impressed to give to her a spiritual transfusion. Just then I said, "Sister, that's exactly what we have come to do!" I had never thought of the claiming of Bible promises as being a spiritual transfusion, but I felt impressed by the Holy Spirit that that's exactly what it is! I must have looked overjoyed as I told her of the victory she would receive that very afternoon as the result of the spiritual transfusion we were about to give to her.

She had already heard the A, B, C's of prayer in the meetings she had attended. She was acquainted that 'A' stood for 'ask', and that 'B' stood for 'believe', and that 'C' meant 'claim' after which thanks was to be offered. She knew that! She had related these A, B, C's to the promises of God's word and realized that each step was important to victory. But we sat there and reviewed it together and thrilled to realize how simple and yet how powerful it was.

"Now," I said, "we are going to take a promise just for you. And as we put our finger on this promise, Matthew 1:21, 'Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins,' we're going to ask Jesus to save you. Now as we ask Jesus to save you with our finger on the promise, we're going to think of it as the transfusion needle piercing the skin and reaching into the vein."

We turned to John 6:53 and I told her this was the reason we were going to think this way. Then I read, "... Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

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"Now," I said, "so you will be able to make the parallel with the blood transfusion, we're going to read John 6:63, '...the flesh profiteth nothing ... it is the spirit that quickeneth; the words which I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.'"

Very quickly she saw that the 63<sup>rd</sup> verse explains the 53<sup>rd</sup> verse. She saw that the life blood mentioned in verse 53 is in reality the word of God. She saw immediately that to ask for salvation was God's will, and that the way He would do it is by the transfusion of His life through the medium of His word, the Bible. Now we could kneel and with our finger on the promise we could imagine the flow of blood being turned on as we asked God to fulfill this promise. "Imagine the blood flowing into your veins," I said, "as we place this request before the Lord in prayer." Then again I invited her to believe that God was doing this very thing, and claim it as being so. We agreed that then we would return thanks to God for having done it.

"How long does it take to give a transfusion?" I asked. "Oh, about an average of forty minutes," she said.

"We're not going to hurry either. We'll just take our time," I said. I then endeavored to have her see that it was impossible for her, in her own strength to find victory over this bad habit or any habit. We turned to Romans 7:14 and saw there, how that because of our carnal nature we are incapable of meeting the standard of the spiritual law by ourselves, simply because we are sold to the program of the devil.

I told her about the early American days of slavery and how that one of the slaves one day decided to run away from his master. But when he got beyond the masters property, he didn't know where to run. Whoever would see him would know that he was a slave because he had been sold into slavery. He was a slave and everyone would know that he belonged to someone. There was no place where he would be free. This is our condition in sin. We're sold into sin because we're a part of the human family. As such we do not deserve a scolding - rather we need to help each other in love and understanding.

Scolding will never release a man out of prison. You can go up to him and remind him of all the evil, terrible things he has said and done; you can berate that man all you want, but it will never release him. What does he need? He needs the keys to that cell door. This is the only thing that will get him out. Why is it we cannot make the transfer of principle to our daily lives. We seem to think that when a man has done something wrong and has become entangled in the snares of Satan, that what he needs is a good scolding.

"Now," I said, "we have seen the condition that we all find ourselves in. Verse 14 has made that very clear." Then I pointed her to the 15th verse and we read it together.

"For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I."

When we read this verse together, she looked up and smiled and said, "That's my problem right here!" "I don't want to do these things at all. I honestly don't want to.

"I know you don't," I said, "but the reason you do them is because you're a slave." I pointed out that there were many things that I did that made me unhappy, but again I pointed out that we are all slaves of sin. And as slaves, we don't need scolding, but we need the keys to set us free.

"Since we can't help ourselves," I said, "but since Jesus can, we're going to kneel in prayer and put our finger on Matthew 1:21 which promises that Jesus will save us. And as we pray we will use the A, B, C's of prayer. We will ask God to save you and release you from the enslavement of these habits. Then we will exercise faith and tell God that we believe that He is doing it right now. We will claim the promise as God has given it and then thank Him for having given you victory and salvation."

I invited the pastor to lead in prayer. I told Bertha that I would pray next and that after I prayed it would be her turn to pray. She admitted that she had never prayed in public before and that she was a little

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nervous trying it now. But I assured her that this wasn't 'public' and that it would be of real benefit to her to engage in this prayer service. She consented to do it and even felt relaxed about it. I suggested, too, before we knelt that we would mix faith with our prayer. Just before we knelt in prayer

I turned to Romans 10:10 and read, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

"You see, I said, "you will Believe that the Lord will give you victory, and then with your mouth you will confess that it has taken place. Don't be afraid to say it," I told her. "Belief", I said, "is essential to salvation, for the Bible says, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved' ....saved from sin!"

So we knelt. First the pastor prayed, and he prayed a very beautiful prayer in which he confessed that we all have sinned and that all of us have come short of the mark that has been set for us. He included each of us in that prayer. But, he reminded us, provision has been made for each of us to become strong where we are weak through the power of Jesus. "Now here is a promise, Lord," he said, "Jesus will save us from our sins. I ask You now, Lord to save Bertha George and give her victory over these habits. I believe that You are, on the basis of these promises, saving her." Then he continued by saying, "Lord, I claim this salvation for her and return thanks unto You that You are doing it."

I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit as this pastor prayed. He was praying a prayer of reception - claiming what God had promised. Since God cannot lie, I knew He was going to answer this request. When he finished, it was Bertha George's turn to pray, and this is what she said:

"Dear Jesus, I don't ask You to save me just from alcohol and tobacco, but I ask You to clean me all up, Amen."

That was a beautiful prayer and prayed so sincerely, but she had left the B and C out of the prayer altogether. I thought for a moment that I ought to have her include them in her prayer, but then I remembered how timid she was and it might embarrass her. I didn't want to do that, so just as soon as she said, "Amen," I continued her prayer by saying,

"...and Lord, we believe You are doing it, and we want to thank You for delivering Bertha George completely." And I got just that far and Bertha George remembered what we had decided before we knelt to pray, and she interrupted my prayer and said,

"Dear Lord, You do love me, don't You? I didn't know that You loved me so. I'm so glad You do love me...."

Why do you suppose she prayed that kind of a prayer at this time? It was because of Pharisaical Sabbath-keeping Christians. When someone has made a mistake and we feel a burden to go to that one and speak to him, instead of saying, "I've come to be of help and comfort and courage to you. Let's pray it through and tell it to no one" - instead of doing this, we give it to them right from the shoulder, and report it next Sabbath morning as 'one missionary visit'! It may be a missionary visit alright, but it cannot be counted as being made for the Lord. No, no.

This poor woman had had that type of a visit made to her and she had lost all sight of the fact that God loved her. But here in the presence of the love of God that filled that room, the Lord helped us to help her see that He still loved her. In the quietness of that moment the impact of His love broke through and she realized it with clarity and power. It broke her all up. She wept for joy as she realized that God loved her. Then she continued, "....thank You Lord, You have delivered me..."

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We rose to our feet and I gripped her hand and said, "Sister George, not because you feel it, but because God has promised, do you believe that you have victory?" I wanted to have her say it again, realizing that confession of belief is so important to lasting victory.

"I know He has given me victory. I know it!"

"Now to whom are you going to give the credit for your victory," I asked.

"Well, I do want to thank you both for coming to see me," she said.

"And we're thankful that we could have the opportunity of coming to see you, but the Lord has said the He will not share His glory with another, and so you must give God all the glory."

"Yes, I know," she said, "God is the one who has given me victory through the power of Jesus."

"That's exactly right," I said. "It was in Jesus' name that we claimed the promise and He has come to deliver you." Then I told her to be quick to tell others about the marvelous deliverance she had received.

"When people see you in the market and ask you why you are so happy, tell them Jesus has delivered you from alcohol and tobacco. Don't mention my name at all. Wherever you go and whoever asks you why you are so happy, tell them of your deliverance through the power of the name of Jesus. But do not mention my name."

She agreed to this and her face bore testimony to the fact that she had found something that she had desperately been searching for. I reminded her that continued victory depended on her willingness to believe and share the experience that she had had.

We had organized Victory Clubs in that church. Whenever someone received the victory over a habit, realizing that the devil would move in and try to discourage that one, we arranged for two church members to come in and have prayer with that one every so often. Two hours from the time we left two ladies dropped by and read a passage of scripture and had prayer with Bertha George. They used the A, B, C's of prayer just as we had done. Then they put their arms around this lady and demonstrated the love that is so necessary when victory has been experienced.

Soul-winning is soul loving. That's why it's important to have your wife with you when you visit. A man needs to have another man put his arms around him and let him feel that we rejoice with him in his victory; a lady needs to have another lady put her arms around her at this critical time. This procedure was repeated every three or four hours. These ladies didn't scold or condemn. They came and demonstrated love in action. They came so that they might rejoice with her in her victory. Each couple stopped to give thanks to God for the victory she had had. This was continued for several days in a row.

A few days later we visited the home again just to see how she was coming along and to see if perchance any one had scolded her. When I inquired how she was doing and whether or not the ladies had come by, she just beamed and told of the love and understanding they had shown. She was just so happy! And I was happy too, not only because Bertha George had experienced victory, but because a change had taken place in the lives of the members of the church.

Less than a week later, in the same church, two alcoholics were present at the after-service. They had come in response to an invitation extended them by two of the members of the church. Now these two alcoholics were not ordinary alcoholics. The neighborhood, on several occasions, called the police officers two and three times a day because of the disturbance they caused. They needed help desperately. They had sat through the evening service and now here we were at the after-service. Each one signed a card and indicated the area in which they most needed help. Both of these individuals signed their names to the card after indicating a need for help in their battle to overcome the habit of drink.

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Somehow Bertha George found out about the problem these two people had, and very quietly she slipped over to where the lady sat and gently took her hand. Bertha was going to begin to witness right then and there. I could hear her say to this lady as she patted her hand and looked with love and understanding into her eyes, "I was one of the worst drunkards in all the city. Jesus helped me to overcome, and He'll help you too. Just ask Him for help. Then believe He will help you and claim the promise that Pastor Coon has shared with us. And then .... and then .... and then - you will thank Him for having given you the victory!" She just beamed as she spoke to this lady. You could tell she was talking from experience. Tears streamed down each of their faces. The husband looked on, visibly moved.

It was ten days before our busy program would allow us to visit in the home of these two alcoholics. I was so anxious to find out what had happened. I didn't want to express doubt, so I said, "Isn't it wonderful what the Lord does for us?" They agreed to that, but nothing more. I still didn't know whether they had gotten the victory over drink, and I didn't want to ask. I said, "Isn't it wonderful how the Lord gives us victory?" Again they agreed. I thought I would plunge into the question and ask it right out. I asked, "How long has it been now since you've had a drop of alcohol?"

"The last drop we drank was ten days ago. Not a single drop since we attended your meetings!" Both of them looked so clean and neat - and so happy.

I, too, felt happy and wanted to shout and praise the Lord for what He had done. The story doesn't end there. Bertha George continued to be an inspiration to this couple and they continued to have the victory. But not only was Bertha George an inspiration to this couple. A few weeks after this experience, I overheard Bertha in the lobby of the church talking with a stranger to me. I edged a little closer so that I could overhear their conversation without looking inquisitive. The lady was asking Bertha the secret to victory over alcohol. Bertha George was sharing with her the A, B, C's of prayer. She gave them perfectly and with such conviction. She spoke from experience and I could tell that the lady sensed it. Oh, what a story of deliverance she had to tell.

This is part of the everlasting gospel that will go to all the world. And when it is received into the heart it will change men and women so that they become like Jesus. Isn't it a wonderful thought that regardless of our problem, Jesus has the answer? He wants to answer the earnest request of your heart. He can, and will do it for you.