

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:19, 20).

SODA TASTES GOOD

My wife and I love Dr. Pepper. Each of us could easily drink three cans a day. Every time we drink that soda, it tastes good and even makes us feel good. The problem, however, is that if we did drink three cans a day, once that taste and feel-good effect wore off, we would feel sluggish and dehydrated. If we were to continue this pattern, each time we drank, the beverage would taste good and make us feel good, but each night we would still get that sluggish, dehydrated feeling. Furthermore, after a while we would notice that we had gained weight, we could no longer do certain things, we grew tired more easily, and we were experiencing heart problems.

BUT WATER IS BETTER FOR YOU

On the flip side, a lot of people think water does not taste nearly as good as soft drinks. We typically do not get some kind of feel-good rush when we drink it. However, water has tremendous effects on every part of the body.

When I was running track in college, I had some great coaches. They saw potential in me my freshman year, but I was not a strong runner like my teammates. I kept pushing myself at practice but saw only minor improvements. Then one of our coaches told our team that if we wanted to see maximum results, we had to cut out all soda and start eating healthier foods. This change did not appeal to me because I was drinking at least one soda a day and eating chicken fingers and fries multiple times a week. I loved my coaches, though, and I wanted to be great for them and myself. So I decided to make those changes. I started drinking lots of water, juice, and Powerade. I ate salads for lunch and dinner, had sandwiches with ham and turkey, and ate a bunch of fruit.

Within a year I went from being a below-average runner to qualifying for the national championship in our league. I had never felt better. I had a lot more energy, felt happier, and was at my highest level of athletic performance.

The rewards do not mean making the changes was easy. I struggled many days because I found it difficult to drink more water and eat healthier food, especially since those things were not nearly as enjoyable as my old diet. But the effects of eating and drinking right were well worth the difficulty. Every time since then that I drank cans of soda throughout a day, I have regretted it later. But I have never regretted the changes I made that year, because the way I felt in the long run was unlike anything I had ever experienced.

SIN IS LIKE SODA

The same is true with how the lost world views sin. Sin is like soda. People know that if they do sinful things, their sin will make them feel good. Sin is a feel-good experience. The problem is that the long-term effects are devastating. The long-term effects of living in sin will lead to a person feeling depressed, lonely, anxious, and empty—as if there is a void because something is missing.

Following Jesus, in contrast, is like drinking water (John 4). It will not always be the most attractive thing; it will be challenging; and the world will scream that if you follow Jesus, you will not have a happy or loving life. But nothing could be further from the truth. The benefit of following Jesus is a life filled with hope, peace, joy, and, above all, love from Jesus (Romans 5:1–4; Galatians 5:22; Hebrews 6:19), and that love will pour out into every facet of your life (Romans 5:5).

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This “water” is what we Christians must start sharing with people in the world. Yes, sin will taste good and momentarily give them a feel-good experience, but that feeling will not last. Following Jesus will be difficult at times, but His love endures forever (1 Corinthians 13:8), and the fruit of the Spirit—which they will begin to see in their lives—will give them joy that is constant (Romans 15:13; 1 Peter 1:7–8; 1 John 1:4). This is our good news to tell to those who are deceived by the world, which tells them sin will give them joy and love.

Love your neighbors with true Christian love, being kindhearted and gentle toward them, but also directing them to their need to repent.

JESUS IS THE LIVING WATER

Jesus died on the cross for us all, despite what lifestyles we were living and what gods we worshiped. Many people stop there and conclude that since Jesus showed unconditional love for all people—despite our sinful lifestyles—then we believers should not tell others how to live. Rather, we should just love them—despite their sinful lifestyles. So often our culture misses the truth that for anyone to receive the gift of salvation, which Jesus made freely available to all, there has to be repentance of sin. How can anyone follow Jesus but also still follow what is right in the eyes of mankind? The truth is that without repentance, there is no salvation (Acts 2:38; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). Thus, people cannot follow Jesus without repenting from their sinful lifestyle.

I urge each of us believers to love our neighbors with true Christian love, being kindhearted and gentle toward them, but also directing them to their need to repent and place their faith in Jesus' redeeming death on the cross (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Or, if we see them stuck in the error of their way, let us redirect them to the truth (James 1:20). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6), and John wrote, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). This is the Love we are called to show all people. This is the Love that will change every aspect of their lives for the better and give them joy and peace that surpass all understanding no matter what life throws at them (Philippians 4:7). ■

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