

The Porch And A Rattlesnake

by John Isaac Edwards

Wisdom literature instructs, “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder” (Prov. 23:31-32). Wine and strong drink are deceptive (Prov. 20:1). Such may appear pleasant and peaceful, but their effects are horrifyingly painful! Let me take just a moment and talk to you about the porch and a rattlesnake, in light of what the wise man said.

1) **The Porch.** Some have been made to think that it is a sin to get drunk, but that there’s nothing wrong with a little social drinking — having a glass of wine with the gals or a beer or two with the fellas. They think that “excess of wine” (1 Pet. 4:3) allows moderate drinking. I wonder, does “excess of riot” (1 Pet. 4:4) sanction riot on a small-scale? And, who decides what is excessive? How do you know at what point you will become “drunk”? The first two words of our text — “Look not” — prohibit drinking in any amount. It’s the same kind of language used in reference to the strange woman — “Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house” (Prov. 5:8). In other words, stay as far away as you can. Some, however, want to

get as close to the edge as they can. One might think I’m going to the drinking party, but I’m not going to drink. That’s like saying, “I’m just going to stand on her porch and talk to her through the screen door. I’m not going in her house.” Since “her house inclineth unto death” (Prov. 2:18), stay off the porch -- don’t even cross her property line!

2) **The Rattlesnake.** Did you notice that wine is likened to “a serpent” in our text? When I preached on this text recently, a brother showed me on his hand where he had been bitten by a rattlesnake. The fang marks looked fresh as if it happened only a few days ago. I asked, “When did this happen?” He said, “Sixty years ago.” Though he received the anti-venom and was healed of the snake bite, the serpent left its mark on him. This is true of “that old serpent, the devil” (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). Sin, though it may be forgiven, — yes, “drunkards” can be “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified” (1 Cor. 6:9-11) — often leaves marks that last a lifetime. It may be health problems (liver disease, nerve damage, damage to the brain, cancer), unintentional injuries (car crashes, falls, burns), losses (job, spouse, children), painful memories of sacrificing things of

value for the lure of liquor like those who “...have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink” (Joel 3:3). It not only leaves its mark on the drinker, but there are often marks left on innocent bystanders. It’s left its mark on wives, children, families who have been victims of violence and car collisions operated by those under its influence. You need to know, before you pick up that glass of wine or put that bottle or can in your hand, that you are taking a serpent by the tail! And, as the wise man said, “....At the last it biteth like a serpent...” There’s nothing pleasant about that! That’s what the alcohol ads don’t show. No, they want you to see it moving aright, everyone seemingly having a good time. They don’t show you “the last” - when “it biteth like a serpent”. And, like a serpent’s bite, it comes suddenly and unexpectedly! But come it will, and rest assured, its bite will be excruciatingly painful and its effects long-lasting.

So, stay off the porch — don’t go near the door of her house. Stay far away from it. Don’t even look at it. That old serpent is lurking. “Be sober, be vigilant...Whom resist steadfast in the faith...” (1 Pet. 5:8).

The Perception Is...

by *Connie W. Adams*

“A good name is better than precious ointment” (Eccl. 7:1). “Only let not your good be evil spoken of” (Rom. 14:16). Timothy was “well reported of by the brethren” (Acts 16:2). Surely, we would rather be held in respect than despised. But sometimes perceptions are unjust. Ahab’s perception of Elijah was that he was the one who “troubleth Israel” (1 Ki. 18:17). It was really the other way around. Jesus was perceived by the Jewish rulers as a “blasphemer” who had to be stopped at all cost. For that reason they “took counsel together to put Him to death” (Jn. 11:53). Yet Peter said that He “left us an example that we should walk in His steps; Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth” (1 Pet. 2:21-22). Paul said, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). The perception of both unbelieving Jews and Greeks was wrong. The truth? “But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God — is stronger than men” (v. 25). Unbelieving Jews created a false impression about Paul and his companions at Thessalonica. They dragged “certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, ‘these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also’” (Acts 17:6). The perception spread. “And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things” (v. 8).

But it was all based on false information. But still, that was the perception.

1) **Image Problems.** Let’s face it, Jesus, the apostles and the early church suffered from an image problem. I guess Demas succumbed to it for he “forsook...having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). The church of our Lord has often suffered from an image problem. “That’s the little bunch who thinks they are the only ones who are right.” “Oh, they are the ones who don’t believe in music in the church.” The perception of many younger people now is that organized religion is hypocritical, repressive, and out of touch with life in the real world. On top of that they are judged to be too judgmental and bigoted.

2) **Solving The Image Problem.** I don’t know that we always can solve it. We cannot compromise the truth because some who stand for it have been slandered and false perceptions have been created. All of us need to keep on preaching what we know to be the truth, doing what we know to be right, and living uprightly before God and the world, whether or not the perceptions are changed. In the final analysis, does it really matter what people think of us? No, it does not. What matters is what God thinks about us. If my action is right before God, then whatever contrary perceptions may prevail are of no importance. When we begin to sample perceptions, brotherhood or otherwise, and decide

our actions and associations accordingly, then we have sold out our principles for the pottage of human approval and opinion. Is there a price to pay sometimes for acting contrary to the “perception which is out there?” Absolutely. You may have a meeting or two canceled without any explanation. That happened to me twice this year. One was cancelled with no other explanation than “for the health of the church.” I don’t know if that meant the church was all too sick to attend a meeting or they thought my preaching would make them all sick. Another was cancelled with the explanation “due to circumstances.” When I inquired what those “circumstances” were, I received no answer. Do churches have the same right to cancel meetings as to schedule them? Of course they do. But there is such thing as honorable treatment which even people in the world recognize in the realm of business dealings.

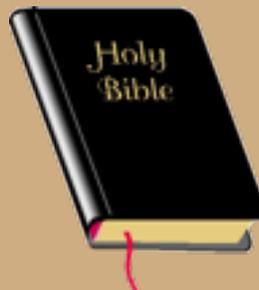
Am I going to cut off association with brethren I know to be honorable and who are engaged in activities which are just and right because of some “perception out there”? No sir, I am not. Others may choose whatever course they desire, but it appears to this old country boy that principle and perception are not always on the same page. The measure of a man’s character and caliber may well be decided by which one he chooses. “Buy the truth and sell it not” (Prov. 23:23).

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