

## **27: FUNDAMENTALISTS, CHRISTIAN DRUNKS, AND CHRISTIAN CRITICS (Luke 7:31-35)**

I have a critical spirit running through my blood. Let me explain.

My Dad was born of a mother, Mary, who almost became a nun in the Catholic Church, but then fell in love with an eighth grade-educated bluegrass playin' man from Kentucky named Edward White, who they also called "Bubby". She left the call to become a nun, renounced the Catholic Church, and her and Edward got married. They became a part of the Church of Christ on Brown Street in Akron, Ohio.

The Church of Christ on Brown Street in Akron, Ohio was an independent congregation. All Churches of Christ are, so they can differ. But this one in particular, held to preaching only the King James Version of the Bible, held that only acapella singing without instruments was allowed in worship, and was truly biblical worship, and held that one had to be baptized by immersion to truly be saved. Many who were part of this Church thought that adhering to these doctrines made them true Christians, and therefore better than other believers. Many in this particular Church of Christ thought that Billy Graham was a heretic. They even thought, in this particular Church of Christ at the time, that their Church was one of the more faithful Churches of Christ amongst the Churches of Christ denomination!

So you can bet that my Dad grew up thinking that he knew better than others. He raised me to think that I knew better than others as well, though my Dad walked away from Christianity altogether from age 13 to 57, he still had that fundamentalist bent, a critical spirit. I have it too. I often struggle with being critical. It's a force that the enemy uses in my life to mess with me all too often.

But I think if all of us were honest, we'd all admit that we struggle with being critical to some degree. Again, some call this having a "critical spirit".

Jesus called out the critical spirit of the religious people of His time when He concluded the chunk of text in Luke 7:1-30 with the third and final subunit and a parable. Jesus said;

**31** *"To what then should I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to each other:*

*We played the flute for you,  
but you didn't dance;  
we sang a lament,  
but you didn't weep!*

**33** *For John the Baptist did not come eating bread or drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon!' 34 The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' 35 Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children."* (Luke 7:31-35)

Here's a little context first;

Jesus warned the current generation of religious leaders about their response to John. He did so through a parable, as he often did when discussing the kingdom or God's plan (Matt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2; 25:1; Luke 13:8). He compared them to an ancient game of children at play. One can call this comparison "***the parable of the brats!***" Jesus was clearly comparing the complaining children to this generation, that is, to the Jewish objectors (Luke 7:33 - 34). The parable was told from their perspective. They were the children who were seated and refused to play, complaining that John and Jesus did not dance to their tune. Whether they played a light tune on the flute or a funeral dirge, these two men did not follow the Jewish leadership's desires. They charged John with being demonic and Jesus with gluttony and questionable friendships. Jesus' open effort

to reach sinners represented a repudiation of the leadership's more separatist approach (5:31 - 32; 15:1 - 32).<sup>1</sup>

The bratty nature of humans has been evident throughout history, and religious people are no exception. Think for a moment about the Israelites, who, after being rescued out of slavery through miraculous plagues, then deliverance through the Red Sea that engulfed Pharaoh's army, spent a lot of their energy grumbling, complaining, stalling and stifling the progress of Israel through the wilderness. What should have been an eleven day journey ended up taking forty years, because of Israel's complaining, disobedience, sidetracking, and even apostasy. Read the book of Exodus to learn more.

And these children who rejected the melodies of the flute and lament in Jesus's parabolic playground symbolized the Jewish religious objectors to God's New Covenant. They were no different than their ancestors in the wilderness, and no different than many of us today. They had a critical spirit.

Gotquestions.org put together a great little article defining a critical spirit and pointing to many scriptures to expose the problems of having one. We should heed its advice! I'll include and analyze it here:

A critical spirit is not difficult to recognize. Its fruit is usually evident. Someone with a critical spirit is prone to complaining, seeing the glass as half-empty, ruing unmet expectations, sensing failure (in others more than in oneself), and being judgmental. Critical spirits are no fun to be around; neither are they fun to possess.

As with most sin, having a critical spirit is a perversion of something God made to be good—in this case, a longing for God and His perfection. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "[God] has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." We live in a fallen world, and we are often impatient to enter into the glorious perfection for which we were originally created. In a sense, it is good that we can see what's lacking in this world; after all, the world is not as it should be, nor are we as we should be. Recognizing the world's insufficiency helps us to acknowledge our need for a Savior. But having a critical spirit can blind us to the grace and beauty that God continues to bestow every day. A critical spirit can also be seen as a perversion of discernment. Often, those accused of having a critical spirit make valid points. They just make their points in an unpalatable manner.

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<sup>1</sup> NIV Application Commentary Copyright © 1996 by Darrel L. Bock.

Obviously, critical spirits are destructive, tearing down both the recipient and the giver of the criticisms (Galatians 5:14-15). The Bible speaks against such critical judgment. In Matthew 7:1-2 Jesus says, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." Jesus is not saying that we should not be discerning or that we should ignore the fallen nature of the world. He is also not saying that we must never, under any circumstance, criticize anyone else. In fact, the Bible tells us that we are to judge rightly (John 7:24). However, we are not to criticize with malicious intent or out of pride, hypocrisy, or self-righteousness. We cannot assume that we are impartial or that we can fairly exact our standards on others. Humans have naturally deceitful hearts (Jeremiah 17:9) that allow for blind spots and inappropriate comparisons. Only God can judge with perfect accuracy (Hebrews 4:12; James 4:11-12; 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Isaiah 11:4; Revelation 19:11). And our discernment is only valid when it is informed by a renewed nature in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14-16; John 16:13). Only when we are submitted to Christ and honest with ourselves will our judgment serve to edify rather than destroy.<sup>2</sup>

One time I had a friend I was in a discipleship group with who was really struggling with pornography. His wife didn't know. They had been married for a short time. I was young in my faith and had been free from porn for six years. I felt like I needed to urge him to confess his porn addiction to his wife and get help before it jacked up their marriage. He told me he didn't want to tell her. I told him that if he didn't tell her, I would, and basically forced him to tell her.

Now my intentions were pure, but was my approach helpful to this man and his wife? I'm not so sure. They're still married. I'm sure God used it somehow. And I sure wish that more of you dudes reading this right now would stop looking at porn and cheating on your wives with images of drugged up women having sex, and faking orgasms for your entertainment and climax, while really many of them are likely being pimped by someone. Anyways each of those women is a daughter to someone. They were once little babies and young girls!

But I know that my critical spirit took over in this situation with my friends addiction to porn, and my approach was more destructive than it was edifying.

Before you make any decision to do anything, to say anything, or take any action, pray to the Holy Spirit and ask Him if it's edifying or destructive. Look to the Scriptures about the subject and find the answers. I can guarantee you that the Holy Spirit can lead you and teach you to be helpful, encouraging, loving, bold and truthful, all at the same time!

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/critical-spirit.html>

From Him (Father, Son, and Spirit) the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part. (Eph. 4:16)

So how do we overcome a critical spirit? The condition of our heart is crucial. Luke 6:45 says, "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Critical words spring from a critical heart. And a critical heart generally comes from a misunderstanding of God's grace—either due to pride or a simple lack of information about God's character and the meaning of salvation. Only when we understand our depravity apart from God and the depth of His grace will we be able to bestow grace to others (Romans 3:23; 6:23; Colossians 2:13-15; Ephesians 2:1-10). Those who struggle with a critical spirit know that they can never live up to their own standards. They are constantly judging others and themselves and always coming up lacking. But Christ fills this lack! He is perfect and righteous, and He freely grants that righteousness to those who believe in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). The better we understand God's grace, the more gracious we will be with others (1 Peter 2:1-3). And the more grateful we will be. The giving of thanks is a strong antidote to a critical spirit.<sup>3</sup>

If you want to understand hip hop, you have to study what was happening in the black community of the Bronx in NYC back in the late seventies. You have to know that the Bronx was burning down, literally. Buildings were being set on fire and decimated. There were piles of bricks and rubble everywhere. Poverty was rampant. You need to know that the music programs got cut in New York City, and kids in the Bronx didn't have access to musical instruments. They did, however, have access to record players and microphones. Kids in the Bronx like Grandmaster Flash, who was an analytical and musical genius, didn't have a saxophone or guitar to be the grandmaster of. But he did invent things with the turntable record player that no one before him had put together, and was part of a movement of folks who innovated a new style of music out of the poverty, rubble, and disadvantages of the Bronx in late 1970's NYC!

If you understand all of that about hip hop, it starts to mean more to you!

If you want to overcome a critical spirit, you gotta go back to the source. Jesus! Remember how much He has forgiven you of your sin! How do you then have a right to act like you're better than others in any way? How do you have a right to think that your gifts and abilities are somehow superior to others? When we're humbled by the fact that the Lord Jesus, who was perfect in every way, and who God made to not know sin, became sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/critical-spirit.html>

5:21) We then realize that we don't have the right to flex at all. Really, we're a gathering of imperfect people that need to utilize all that we've been given by God with all our might to work together to bring about His Kingdom in our context. That's what the Church is supposed to be!

Another antidote to a critical spirit is a heart of worship to the King! People who are poisoned with a critical spirit have a criticalness towards God as well in worship. People with a critical spirit don't see worship as a time to connect with the Lord, invite His healing in, His joy in, and His peace into their bodies, souls, minds, hearts, and spirits. They're not humble enough for that. They see it as a time to scoff at people who are in love with the Lord. They see it as a time that's uncomfortable. Their criticalness of people turns into a critique of God. "Why should God need to be worshiped and adored? It's just weird and sappy", they tell themselves. "Besides, this song that's being played isn't what I'm into", they say. Really, they're just afraid of getting vulnerable before God and, in turn, take it out on others.

Notice I said nothing about the physical posture of a worshiper here. Someone can have a critical spirit and be lifting their hands, singing loudly, and doing so while being annoyed with everyone who isn't displaying emotion to God as much as them, and that's just as critical as scoffing and refusing to show adoration. The posture of worship towards God that is correct is a heart posture. Someone can be quietly singing to themselves while sitting with their head bowed. Someone can be lifting up their hands in adoration and praising God loudly while dancing. If their heart posture is one of worship, surrender, humility, repentance, and longing for Christ, then that kind of worship will be kryptonite to the critical spirit within a human being.

When I get stressed out, I get critical. I was stressed out recently and sad over the departure of some people from our Church. We had a few departures at once, which made it even harder. For those of you that don't know, Isaiah and Laura Bertsch left Streetlight to move on to a Church in their neighborhood of North Hill, wanting to be more incarnated in their community. Amy and Andrew Husted left Streetlight to find another Church that aligns with them more than ours. Isaiah, Andrew and Amy were all leaders on our Direction Team. They sat at the table helping to lead our Church community through a very difficult and trying season. They saw a lot of my flaws. I know these things played into their decision to leave though they still kept everything on good terms. I certainly felt the blow of them leaving. Please continue to pour love, encouragement, and grace on them, because that's what Christ followers need to do! Plus, unlike some churches out there, Streetlight doesn't need to behave like a bizarre cult. We're sad when people leave, but pray that the Lord blesses them, and continue to show them grace and love as they depart!

Also, we've recently had the truly beautiful dilemma of having many kids from the neighborhood who aren't following Christ join our community. That has brought some strain on us as the kids don't always act well in our midst, and we've got a great crew of people who are working to train folks in our community to care for these kids well. Many of these kids are coming from the streets and love being with us. Yet we also have Church kids who just need an extra dose of discipleship on Sundays in addition to the ways their parents are discipling them. Will you pray for these kids and their families also?

But all that stress led me to be real snippy, grumpy, depressed, and short-fused at home for the past few months. It came to a breaking point last week where I was frustrated with one of my kids about their behavior, and lost my temper at them, yelling at them and making them upset to the point of tears. When I realized I had crossed a line back into a part of Ben that is in the process of being thoroughly crucified, I quickly retracted my temper and began to apologize.

And then, a few hours later, plagued by my critical spirit, questioning God as to why things are always so hard at Streetlight, why it's hard to keep people in our ministry, why our context is so tough, why resources are hard to come by, why too many Christians don't give a rip about the streets of Kenmore, why people leave the faith and leave the Church altogether, and all the while questioning how my own sins and shortcomings play into our struggles as a Church community, I felt led to turn on Spotify and play a beautiful gospel song on repeat, Kevin LeVar and One Sound's "What a Love"<sup>4</sup> Tears began to rush down my face as I ugly cried, listening to the song, continuing to weep, and pour out all my troubles at the feet of Jesus. My friend Patrick Davis who is also an urban pastor says that crying is like a "shower for the soul". He's right. After this big ol' ugly cry I felt healed, I felt cleansed. I went down to my daughter who I had lost my temper at and made cry. Even though she was in the wrong, I had overreacted and hurt her feelings. I laid on her little shoulder and continued to ugly cry, asking for her forgiveness, and confessing how broken I had felt lately, and how much I was struggling. She wrapped her arms around me in loving forgiveness and restored our closeness as a Father and Daughter again.

Worship is the antidote to a critical spirit. It has the power to heal us from the inside out when we invite God with a posture of love towards Him into our being!

Another important area in the realm of having a critical spirit is our thought lives (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 10:5). Rather than focus on what is missing, we should

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<sup>4</sup> <https://youtu.be/pDfTkvRdN7E?si=ji1Q4pzUjPkTaFRr>

think about what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). This is not to say that we should ignore falsehood, injustice, ugliness, or imperfection. However, we should not dwell on the negatives. Paul instructed the Ephesians regarding this, "We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ . . . so that [the body] builds itself up in love. . . . Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. . . . Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:15-16, 29, 31-32). Sure, things could be better than they are, but love covers many sins (Proverbs 10:12). Forgiveness is a priority. As the Body of Christ, we speak out of a heart of love in order to build each other up. A critical spirit only serves to tear down (Ephesians 4:1-3; Galatians 6:1-5).<sup>5</sup>

Forgiveness is a necessary weapon against a critical spirit. Charles Stanley, in his wonderful book simply called "Forgiveness", points out that not only are we to know that we're forgiven by Christ, but Christ also commands us to forgive one another. He summarizes the process of forgiveness by reminding us that we need to;

1. Know we are forgiven
2. Forgive the debt of the person's sin against us
3. Accept that person as they are and release them from any responsibility to meet our needs
4. View that person as a tool for our spiritual growth, no matter how they respond, and,
5. If possible and right, make reconciliation in the relationship

Being a Christian that doesn't forgive is like being a lumpy dog that doesn't fart. It's supposed to just come with the territory! We have been forgiven such a massive debt of sin through Christ, we must dispense this on others, and need the Holy Spirit to help us to do so! If you don't follow me just read Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35. I think that will make it pretty plain for you what Christ is asking of His followers!

It can also be helpful to remind ourselves that we do not know the thoughts and intentions of others. At times, behavior reflects motivation, but not always. Before making a critical remark (whether aloud or to ourselves), we should pause and consider other possibilities. Is this person truly an uncaring jerk, or are they perhaps going

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/critical-spirit.html>



through a difficult situation and in need of grace? The Golden Rule is a very helpful tool.<sup>6</sup>

I've talked before about what my friend Scott Johnson does when he mediates conflicts between people, and he draws a picture of a person, of their heart, of their mind, and little lines coming out of their mouths symbolizing words people say, and then asks both parties if they know what is in the other person's heart or mind, they both can't help but say no, unless they have some bizarre, false relationship with the Holy Spirit. Then Scott leads them to admit that all they can judge of the other person is the words they say, and they can graciously say how those words made them feel. Only God truly knows what's inside a person, and we are not God.

All in all, a critical spirit tears down those around us and robs us of our own ability to enjoy life. When we become overly critical, we miss out on the beauty that God has placed in this world. Small blessings go unnoticed, and we stop being thankful. Overcoming a critical spirit requires gratefulness, a willingness to forgive, an accurate understanding of God's grace (it's free!), an intentional refocusing of our thoughts, and a commitment to share the truth in love. Overcoming a critical spirit is a matter of sanctification, and we have the Holy Spirit's help with that (2 Thessalonians 2:13). As we submit to God, read His Word, and pray for grace, we will find that the critical spirit gives up control to the Holy Spirit!<sup>7</sup>

And again, back to the text at hand. The religious leaders critiqued John and Jesus because they didn't like the veracity of spiritual pressure that their message put on them. So they allowed a critical spirit to take over, and made slanderous assumptions. They couldn't fault John for partying with people and hanging with sinful types, because John had lived like a Nazirite, never touching booze his whole life, and spent his time in the wilderness rejecting excess and inviting people seeking God to repent. So they cooked up the lie from hell that John had a demon, as a way of dismissing John and not having to submit to the conviction that God was dropping on them through John.

With Jesus, they knew that they had a dude claiming to be the Messiah, and he was befriending and hanging out with all sorts of sordid characters- bad people that wouldn't have been allowed in synagogues, or would have been kicked out and labeled unclean or unworthy of God's love. Jesus was inviting these people into discipleship, healing them, casting demons out of them, and their lives were getting transformed and radically changed.

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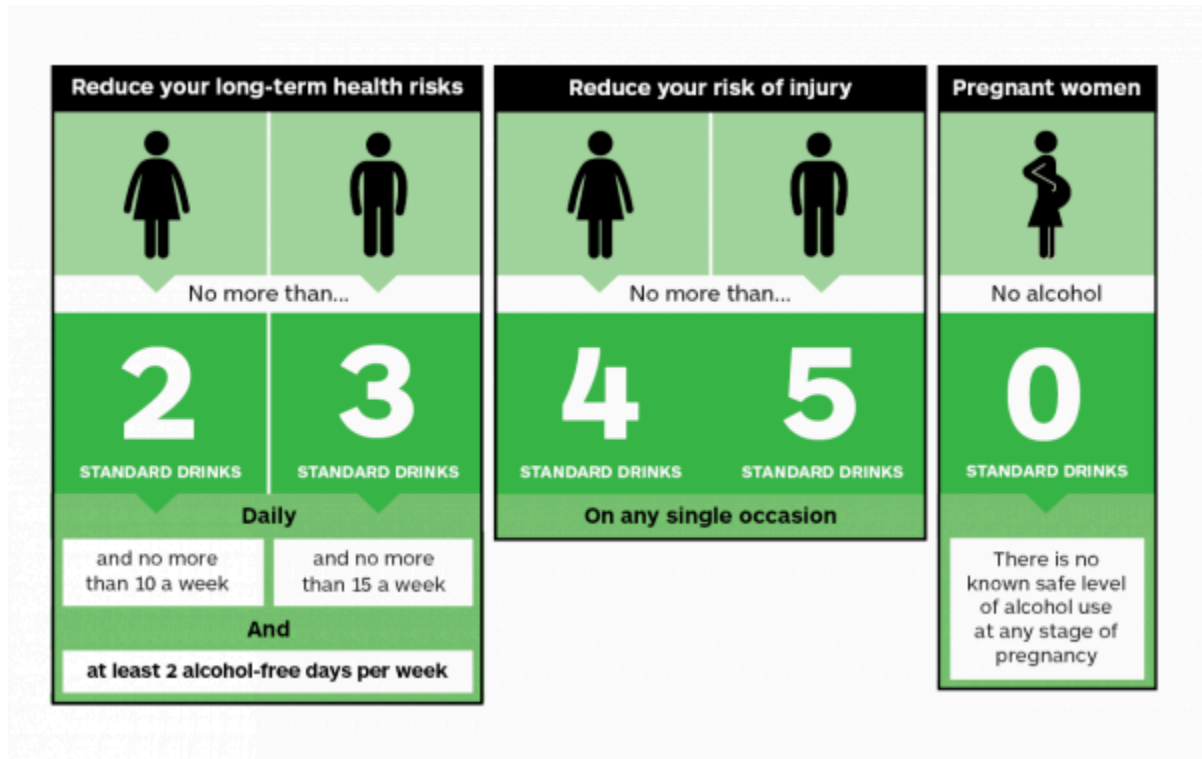
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/critical-spirit.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/critical-spirit.html>

On top of that, Jesus drank wine with folks as he reclined and hung out with them. Jesus didn't get drunk or promote drunkenness in any way, as far too many of His supposed followers in our culture and city and community do. Jesus did sip a little and hang out at times though, sharing the Kingdom and gospel truth with people as they sipped and hung out with Him.

By the way- if you call yourself a Christ follower and constantly need to be drinking, stop it. Get help if you need it, or just cut back. If you can't moderate it and stay away from drunkenness and alcohol addiction, find a way to quit it altogether so you don't destroy your witness. I meet far too many believers who have a drinking problem and won't do anything to combat it.

In fact, I'm gonna do something really weird here as a "pastor", and teach you how to drink. Again, I say that with the caveat that it's best to abstain from alcohol altogether, but if you're going to use it, you need to know how to use it without defying the biblical mandate to avoid drunkenness and dependence on it.



This above chart is from a secular site, nothing biblical about it. It's just the widely accepted, scientific, basic guidelines of what safe alcohol consumption looks like. And it clearly says that it's safe for people to consume no more than 15 standard drinks per week for men, and 10 for women, because of the different physiological size and

metabolism of each. It also says that no more than 2 standard drinks for women and 3 for men should be consumed in a day. Definitely no more than 4 standard drinks for women and 5 for men should be consumed on any single occasion. Pregnant women shouldn't touch alcohol.

And what is a "standard drink"? It's probably much less than you think.



You see, many beers are being sold out there by microbreweries that contain as much as 7-12% alcohol content. And many of them are sold in cans that contain a pint or a little more. A pint contains 16 ounces, so you have to understand that drinking a pint of double IPA would technically be two, sometimes almost two and a half standard drinks- depending on the alcohol percentage in the beer.

Then if one drank a pint of double IPA and drank a shot, that would equal 3 & ½ standard drinks- are you starting to do the math? If someone had the habit of having 3 & ½ to 4 standard drinks on one occasion, and did that three times a week habitually, that would equal about 12 standard drinks.

And yet I meet Christians all the time that drink flagrantly. I know Christians that drink every day. I meet Christians that drink enough to get drunk on a regular basis- which is unbiblical. I won't get into the fact that when you have above the recommended amount of standard drinks a week, you start to kill vital bacteria in your gut and cause digestive issues. Also, when you drink you don't get healthy, good sleep that heals your body and lose REM cycles, causing further health issues. It's obvious that the secular world has clearly defined for everyone what the effects of excessive drinking are- and the Church needs to follow suit for their witness, their health, and more! To add, and just be blunt, drinking too much will mute the voice of the Holy Spirit and cause one to make flaky, stupid, irresponsible decisions in the flesh. But I digress- if you're a disciple of Jesus and have a drinking problem- get the help needed to correct it. It's better not to drink at all. But if you're like me and enjoy some of the effects of moderate alcohol use, you need to know the facts to do so responsibly and not become a drunk fool.

Back to the text... 😊

Since Jesus hung with sinful, unclean people who would have been rejected from the Churches of His day, and since He sipped a little wine here and there, the religious leaders made up the lie from the pit of hell that he was a drunk and a sinner himself. Wow- the sinless Savior being called a sinner by self-righteous sinners who somehow thought they were sinlessly above Him, that's rich! Sickening is more like it!

So Jesus simply said to them that "wisdom is proven by her actions". A tree is known by it's fruit. John's righteousness and Jesus' righteousness would've been evident to anyone who wasn't blinded by a self-righteous critical spirit. But those plagued by self-righteousness and a critical religious spirit could believe the devil's lies about even the Messiah and His forerunning prophet. If that's true, how much more susceptible are you and I to slander and falsely accuse one another? I've seen it many times in the Church.

And those who are truly disciples of Jesus today should be obvious to other true disciples of Jesus! And dang man, the biggest thing we need to do to prove it is just simply love one another, forgive one another, enjoy one another, and build one another up! (John 13:34-35) Religious TURDS please stop! And what I mean by turd is "Totally Uninhibited Reverent Disciple!" 😊

Those who respond, wisdom's children, were contrasted with those who did not, like the comparison in verses 29 - 30. Jesus' associations and John's call registered with some. The presence of the restored vindicated God's way, revealing his wisdom. The divine attempt to reach out to sinners meant that they should not be ignored but pursued. The

rebuke through the parable was another way to say that the leadership was hardhearted in its rejection of God's way.<sup>8</sup>

We, who are in Christ and of Christ, are wisdom's children. Wisdom's children are talked about in Proverbs Chapters 1-8. We have Christ living in us! And therefore, we can discern, ingest, and live out the things of God! We have the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God literally living inside those of us that know the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Holy Spirit, guide us! Holy Spirit, lead us! Holy Spirit, we surrender all to you! Holy Spirit remove our critical spirits! Holy Spirit remind us of the forgiveness of Jesus! Holy Spirit lead us to genuine worship of the King! Holy Spirit lead us to genuine forgiveness of others! Holy Spirit show us all that You are in Your fullness!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you struggle with having a critical spirit, how so?
2. What has helped you in your life to not be controlled by a critical spirit?
3. How have you seen alcohol have a negative impact in people's lives? Have you seen alcohol be used responsibly and positively?

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