

Fourth Quarter Strategies – Saturday, September 30, 2017

In my younger days I always appreciated a bottle of fine varietal wine. California wines were my preference back then and I especially favored a good Gamay Beaujolais. After becoming a follower of Christ I donated my small collection of California wines to a local charity, where I figured the live auction could at least provide some needed funds to help those who were less fortunate. As you probably know, red wines become better with age when cared for properly.

The best wine I ever tasted was a gift from a doctor in El Paso, Texas who had recently retired from the World Health Organization. This gentleman presented me with an Argentinean red table wine that was produced in 1965. It looked quite plain and I distinctly remember taking it to a New Year's Eve party with a small group of work associates years ago. To my surprise, that table wine was simply remarkable and I immediately wished I had saved it for a more special occasion where my friends who appreciated fine wines could have shared the experience with me. Just like a good red wine we too can become better with age.

Whether we become better with age or just bitter is our personal choice. As we age, we will certainly go through many life experiences that will shape our attitudes and the way we think. As a follower of Christ I do my best to pattern my life after others who have gone before me and learn from their example. We're reminded by Christ Jesus himself in John 16:33 *"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

In James 1:2-3, we are instructed *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* In fact, that's what makes for a full-bodied, exceptionally tasty red wine. It must be mature and complete and drinking it before proper aging takes away from the tasting experience.

Early in my insurance sales career I was given a book entitled *THE GREATEST SALESMAN IN THE WORLD* by Og Mandino, which tells the story of Hafid, a poor camel boy who achieves a life of abundance after following the explicit instructions found in ten scrolls. Personally, I found the book inspiring and worthwhile in my professional life and my Christian walk. There are some references to Paul in the book and praying to God, but I never considered it to be strictly for a Christian audience. In fact as a sales manager, I recommended all my agents read the book for their own personal growth and success in their chosen career.

In essence, following "the legend of the ten scrolls" can certainly provide a formula for a full-bodied life that can be satisfying and fulfilling in one's chosen profession. It does not bring about the peace that we all long for as human beings. That can only come from a right relationship with our Father in Heaven through His Son's work on the cross. Completeness can only come from recognizing our sinful nature, turning away from our sinful ways and believing in Christ as Savior and Lord of all.

In his devotional *MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST*, Oswald Chambers often talks about our wanting to become "broken bread and poured-out wine" in our desires to serve God. Chambers ends one of his devotionals in this way: *"I wonder what finger and thumb God has been using to squeeze you? Have you been as hard as a marble and escaped? If you are not ripe yet, and if God had squeezed you anyway, the wine produced would have been remarkably bitter."* He ends the devotion, *"Stay right with God and let Him do as He likes, and you will find that He is producing the kind of bread and wine that will benefit His other children."*

As we grow older and hopefully wiser, I trust you will join me in stopping our whining in the honorable quest to become better, not bitter, with age!

Passages to Ponder: Deuteronomy 4:5-7; Job 12:11-13; Psalm 119:97-104; Proverbs 14:8-12; Ephesians 4:31

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Deuteronomy 4:5-7 New International Version (NIV)

⁵ See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." ⁷ "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?"

Job 12:11-13 New International Version (NIV)

¹¹ Does not the ear test words
as the tongue tastes food?
¹² Is not wisdom found among the aged?
Does not long life bring understanding?
¹³ "To God belong wisdom and power;
counsel and understanding are his.

Psalm 119:97-104 New International Version (NIV)

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⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
⁹⁸ Your commands are always with me
and make me wiser than my enemies.
⁹⁹ I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
¹⁰⁰ I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.
¹⁰¹ I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.
¹⁰² I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.
¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
¹⁰⁴ I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.

Proverbs 14:8-12 New International Version (NIV)

⁸ The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways,
but the folly of fools is deception.
⁹ Fools mock at making amends for sin,
but goodwill is found among the upright.
¹⁰ Each heart knows its own bitterness,
and no one else can share its joy.
¹¹ The house of the wicked will be destroyed,
but the tent of the upright will flourish.
¹² There is a way that appears to be right,
but in the end it leads to death.

Ephesians 4:31 New International Version (NIV)

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.