

PRESSING ON



the e-magazine for growing Christians

April 2016

Special Issue

Alcohol and the Christian




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On the Mark

LIES THE DEVIL WILL TELL YOU ABOUT SOCIAL DRINKING

By Mark Roberts, editor

False teaching loves to boil its position down to a quick one liner. An easy to repeat mantra, like “Don’t judge!” can blunt truth and appear to support error. People simply spit out “the line” mantra thought and consider the matter settled.

Anytime the debate on social drinking is engaged these sorts of devilish mantras appear. They are nothing but lies from hell but they are easy lies to believe and repeat. For example . . .

They drank wine in the Bible so we can today. This assumes the wine in the Bible is the same as the wines of today. They are not. It is a documented fact of history that wines of Bible times were often heavily diluted with water and had an extremely low alcoholic content. The Bible even uses the term “wine” to refer to unfermented grape juice (see Isaiah 65:8). Yes, there are alcoholic wines in the Bible (Gen 9:21) but context needs to help us determine what is being discussed.

The Bible only condemns drunkenness, not social drinking. This is just wrong. 1 Peter 4:3 specially mentions “drinking parties,” an occasion to drink alcohol but not necessarily become drunk. Even more, this line assumes there is a clear, sharp and distinct line between drinking (supposedly righteous) and drunkenness, which all agree is sinful. But where is that line? Medical authorities do not agree among themselves what constitutes intoxication. The legal limit for DWI varies from state to state. The FAA does not allow a pilot to fly who has had *even one drink* less than eight hours before flight time, which says a lot about where they think the line is!

The Bible doesn’t explicitly forbid social drinking so it must be okay. This says if we can’t read in giant print a “thou shalt not” then God is giving us the green light to go ahead. Yet if that is so then pornography, abortion, polygamy and a host of other sins must all be fine too! Of course, every passage that demands disciples be “sober minded” stands as an explicit condemnation of social drinking (see 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Timothy 4:5; Titus 2:3). Every passage that calls on Christians to be lights and a good influence for the Kingdom is also an explicit condemnation of social drinking (James 1:27; Matthew 5:11-16).

Jesus made wine at the wedding in Cana so drinking must be okay. This is a marvelous combination of misinformation about wine (see the first point above - the word “wine” in the Scriptures can mean “unfermented grape juice”) and a failure to

think through what is being said. Let's just say in John 2 Jesus did make many gallons of fermented wine for guests at a wedding who had been drinking for some time already. If anyone gets drunk on the wine Jesus made (again, we all admit drunkenness is a sin) isn't Jesus an accessory to sin? Are we really ready to charge Jesus with sin? That conclusion alone says something is seriously awry with trying to find social drinking at the wedding in Cana.

Social drinking is gaining new strength and new proponents among brethren today. Unfortunately many of its arguments are based in ignorance, misrepresentation and a failure to really grapple with the issue at hand. Don't be led astray by easily repeatable lies about alcohol. Think, and think soberly! "Be *sober-minded*; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

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Announcing a Marvelous Travel Opportunity!

Come Cruise with us (70 already signed up) to New England and Canada in 2016!

Mark and Dena Roberts are taking a group to New England and Canada in the fall of 2016. Come cruise with us for the trip of a lifetime. The ports, the lighthouses, the fall foliage ... there is nothing like a trip to the northeast in autumn!



Our trip begins with Princess Cruises. Princess is well-known as a premiere cruise line. Their service, accommodations, amenities and boats are top of the line. Best of all, Princess has guaranteed us private space for our worship services and devotionals.

Our boat is the *Regal Princess*. The *Regal* is a new boat and it is spectacular, with all the amenities that make cruise vacations so relaxing, so luxurious, and so much fun. The *Regal Princess* will leave from New York City and will make port of calls at Newport, Rhode Island; Boston, Mass; Bar Harbor, Maine; Saint John, Canada; and Halifax, Canada. After a day at sea we will return to New York City.

The dates of the cruise are October 1-8, 2016.

The cost will vary depending on the size of room you book, and where you want to be on the boat, but can be as little as \$1164 per person.

For more information and complete details email Mark Roberts at robertsmark@sbcglobal.net or contact Dawn Campbell at Cruises Etc. Travel. Her number is 817-732-6991. Her email is dawn@cruisesetctravel.com. Tell her you are with the "Adventures with Mark and Dena" group.

All it takes to get in on this great trip is a small deposit which is fully refundable if you change your mind. *Tell your friends too!* We took 70 last year on a cruise to Alaska and there is simply nothing as much fun as traveling with brethren. It's uplifting, upbuilding and an incredible experience.

Come cruise with us!

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Be Wise Small

By Dee Bowman

Many thanks for the reactions to my new book, *Be Wise Small*. You're great!

Interesting Words

"Opportunity" was originally a nautical term describing a desirable port of entry.

"Accurate" comes from a Latin word which first meant "to take care of."

"Infant" originated from a Latin word which meant "not to speak."

"Affluent" is somewhat related to "abundance," both having to do with "flowing."

Touché

Socrates was training one of his students. When it came time to charge his parents for services rendered, he assessed them a double fee. When asked why the double fee, he told them he had to teach the young man two sciences instead of just one: how to hold his tongue, then how use it.

It's just so that sometimes the best tongue is the silent tongue.

And what about an appreciative tongue? It has high value. Remember the description of Barnabas? He is called the "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36).

Don't say too much about what you don't know well.

Tongue control is a sure sign of spiritual maturity.

I Wonder—

I wonder if we knew the Lord was coming today how we would talk?

I wonder if we knew the Lord was coming today what would we wear?

I wonder if we knew the Lord was coming today where we'd be?

I wonder if we knew the Lord was coming today if we'd pray?

How do we know He's not?

A Good Preacher

"A good preacher preaches out of conscience. Based on what he understands God to say, and based on the cognizance of his own ability to respond to it, he feels that he is in

some special way responsible to Him. His feeling of responsibility may come from a love for God, or it may come from his compassion for the souls of men. Likely, it is both, in combination with a number of other factors that may be peculiar to his own personality. In any case he becomes acutely aware of his special responsibility to preach the gospel.”

–“*Common Sense Preaching*” pg. 36

Short Sense

Faith without works is dead; works without faith is senseless.

Preparation makes sense, no matter the project; how much more sense regarding eternal matters.

Breaking a bad habit makes sense—so does making a good new one.

A mind with no spiritual inclinations makes no sense.

Learning just makes good sense; so does teaching.

Journal Notes

I miss Jay. I think about him often. I’m so sorry he is gone and yet, knowing where he went makes me hurt somewhat less. I loved him.

A book containing Jay’s writings is now available, thanks to Warren and Paula Berkley. He was such a good student and said things so well. I hope folks will look for it. [\[Click here to order the Jay Bowman book at Amazon.\]](#)

Every day’s a good day. Opportunities are galore so there is no reason why I can’t do something to honor God today—even if it’s just some little something. He’s been so good to me.

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Be Strong and Courageous

THE UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT

By Wilson Adams

It was the most compelling argument I've ever heard against social drinking...

A young man in his 30s (the son of a gospel preacher), stood in front of the *Leaving the Pit* conference in Indianapolis on a recent February Saturday and courageously told his story. His alcohol use began in high school and intensified in college. He hid it well. In fact, he became very proficient at both lying and hiding.

He began drinking more heavily even though he was actively involved in church activities—even preaching on occasion. “It was nothing for me to drink on Saturday night and stumble into church services on Sunday morning,” he said. He continued, “Knowledge was not my problem; connecting my heart to my head was my problem.”

He shrugged off his first DUI. However, as he sat in a jail cell following his second DUI, he looked around at other alcoholics a decade his senior and asked, “Is this there I want to be in ten years?” He knew then he had reached a critical turning point. It was decision time.

Fortunately, he made the right one.

Today, he is ten years sober, married, a father, and most importantly, faithful to his Lord. As he told his powerful story, the silence in the room was deafening. And then he said...

I go to an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meeting where people like me confess their struggles and where it is acknowledged openly that we cannot place ourselves in any situation where we would be tempted to drink—and then I attend a Sunday Bible class and hear a brother in Christ make a comment that he ‘doesn’t see anything wrong with social drinking...’ and I’m left shaking my head.

Me, too.

Am I My Brother’s Keeper?

Sadly, alcohol is the leading drug of choice for many. Make no mistake: it is a drug—albeit bottled and available over-the-counter. It is powerful, addictive, and life changing. And the life changes it brings are not positive.

“Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Another recovering alcoholic friend noted that while some brethren argue for the right of social drinking, he is forced to draw a firm line in the sand. While he assumes the honesty of their search for truth, he equally confesses the honesty of his own personal struggle when he states, “If you believe in and promote social drinking, I cannot be your friend.”

“Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Quit Deflecting and Deal with the Obvious

Anyone who believes the social use of drugs (bottled or otherwise) is okay for God’s child, needs to “prove all things” by setting forth a biblical case for recreational (social) drug use. It’s easy to deflect or ignore the power of our brethren’s testimony. Given that Scripture urges God’s followers to “examine everything carefully and cling to what is good,” it is imperative that we see through the eyes of wisdom-based principles. Seriously, who would affirm the following:

“The recreational use of mind-altering drugs is wise for me to pursue and something I recommend overtly or covertly (by my influence) to my brothers and sisters in Christ.”

???

This is not about medicine (argument deflection), or “Is it a sin for one drop of alcohol to touch the lips of a Christian” (sarcastic deflection), or degrees of intoxication (delusional deflection—since we’re talking about something that removes your cognitive ability to think/reason), but a serious question about addiction potential and a Christian’s influence upon others.

It’s a tragedy when a brother in Christ finds more encouragement to avoid alcohol at an AA meeting than he does in a Sunday Bible class. What are we thinking? Apparently, we’re not.

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” I better know I am.

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Courageous Living Series

The *Courageous Living* series of workbooks by Wilson Adams includes a variety of textual and topical studies that are grounded in the Word of God. Well-written, fresh and relevant, they serve as great tools for individual study, small-group discussions or congregational Bible classes. <http://www.courageouslivingbooks.com>

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Mind Your Faith

ALCOHOL AND WISDOM

By Doy Moyer

Let's start with some basic facts about alcohol, as provided by the Centers for Disease Control. Under the category of drinking "too much," the CDC says that "excessive alcohol use led to approximately 88,000 deaths" each year in the United States from 2006-2010. Excessive drinking was responsible for 1 in 10 deaths among working-age adults aged 20-64 years, and "most people who drink excessively are not alcoholics or alcohol dependent." They further list a number of risks associated with drinking. What intrigues me is that they list "some persons who should not drink any alcohol," and among them include those who will be "participating in other activities requiring skill, coordination, and alertness."

We may immediately recall:

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).

"Therefore be on the alert..." (Acts 20:31)

"Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

"So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

Should any of this factor into decisions about whether Christians ought to be drinking? Let's ask it this way: what is the wise and discerning choice to make today?

Most Christians will recognize the difficulties in Scripture over the subject of drinking alcohol. On the one hand, there are passages that speak of "wine" in positive terms (Psalm 104:15; Ecclesiastes 10:19). On the other hand, the warnings against strong drink, and especially drunkenness, are clear and unequivocal (Proverbs 20:1; 21:17; 23:30-31). Drunkenness will keep one out of the kingdom of heaven (Galatians 5:21). Drinking parties and the like are among the lusts of men from which Christians are to refrain (1 Peter 4:1-4). Peter speaks of Christians being different enough in this respect that the world thinks it strange that we don't do what they do. The New Testament emphasis is on the mind that is sober, alert, and able to make godly, sound decisions (cf. 1 Peter 3:13; 4:7; 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8; 2 Timothy 4:5). Beware of anything that

runs counter to that.

There is much to say about all these, and other, passages. The question is over whether modern Christians have God's blessing to, or should, engage in "social drinking." I am not discussing medical usage, but drinking alcohol for non-medical and recreational reasons. My purpose here is to consider the issue from a wisdom perspective. What will godly wisdom teach us about choices we make in our modern world relative to drinking alcohol? One thing we can all agree on is this: drunkenness is sinful and will destroy a soul.

Anyone thinking about recreational drinking needs to consider the implications of the practice. The biblical warnings are strong enough that anyone should exercise great care and concern before participating in or advocating a practice that has devastated lives and families. Even secular warnings concur. God's word is meant to give us wisdom to discern right from wrong (Hebrews 5:14). In the face of difficulties, we need to think things out and decide, with wisdom from above, whether or not this is an activity Christians ought to be involved in today. Following are some principles for consideration:

1. Drunkenness is a process, not just a state. At what point do you call a person drunk? One doesn't just drink and drink, unaffected, then suddenly is drunk at the next sip. It takes time for the alcohol to take effect. Further, the point at which one is drunk is person-dependent, and the only way to know when too much has been imbibed is to test it out. In other words, you will never know your limits on this until you've exceeded them. Does this sound wise? Even law enforcement today will charge someone with DUI over a small percentage of a difference in the level of alcohol in one's system, yet the person getting drunk won't think he is drunk. Alcohol breaks down inhibitions and warps one's ability to make sound judgments. One of those warped judgments is just how sober one really is while in the process of drinking.

I realize that this same problem would have been around in biblical times. However, consider the next point for more perspective.

2. The reasons for drinking today are not identical to ancient times. We can find passages that speak favorably of "wine," but should all of these be equated to our modern circumstances? They didn't have a great deal of variety when it came to quenching a thirst, and their water alone wasn't exactly the healthiest option. It wasn't always just about the taste, and usually the alcohol was diluted. With as much emphasis as some will put on understanding the ancient culture as so important to understanding any given text, I find it odd that they wouldn't say the same when it comes to the passages dealing with alcohol. If our circumstances today were identical to the ancients, that would be one thing. But when it comes to drink and thirst quenching, it is not quite the same. One writer, from a secular perspective, observed the following about ancient

wines:

“You’ve got to remember [that] for thousands of years, if you lived in a town or a village, the water was pretty undrinkable. ... [I]f you lived in ancient Athens or if you lived in ancient Babylon or Alexandria, you couldn’t drink the water, so wine was something that people drank from morning to night. Babies drank it; old people drank it; soldiers drank it; everybody drank wine all the time, and in order for them not to be falling down drunk by 10 in the morning, they mixed it with water and used it to sanitize or purify the water.” (Paul Lukacs author of “Inventing Wine: A New History of One of the World’s Most Ancient Pleasures,” NPR interview).

If we are going to equate the ancient world with modern times on this, then will we drink it “all the time”? Will we give it to our babies?

3. Further, the alcohol industry of the ancient world was not what it is today either. Perhaps there were fermented juice merchants, but it wasn’t a multi-billion dollar industry that depends upon people buying and consuming their products in mass quantities. Distilled liquor is not equivalent to ancient drinks naturally fermented. Then, there were no major advertising campaigns for liquor. You wouldn’t have seen billboards advertising the glories of the product. While “wine” is used to translate a number of Hebrew and Greek terms that includes the juice still in the grape to the stronger drink, you wouldn’t have had the vast array of choices found in modern liquor stores. People could certainly get drunk then, but it wasn’t the type of industry being flaunted today. What does this have to do with it all? Simply this: drinking fermented juice with alcoholic content, typically diluted, was part of a daily culture that had little choice in drinks and needed its water content doctored. I don’t doubt that it would have tasted good and refreshing to them, but I do doubt that the typical person would have normally gotten drunk, which is why the drinking parties warned about would have been significant. I just don’t believe our cultures compare very well in this respect.

4. Alcoholism today is a real and serious problem that is never helped by anyone pushing the right to drink. Romans 14 teaches that we must not use any perceived rights to the detriment of our brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. If someone is struggling with alcoholism (and we may not even know who is), we must respond with compassion and a desire to help. It is bad enough that this person, even after receiving help, may well be tempted by the mere suggestion. Alcoholism is a serious, recognized problem, and it is often attended with other debilitating issues like depression. One night of drinking a little much can lead to a lifetime of heartache, or even death.

5. If you have never been around a real drinker and witnessed first hand the havoc drinking can bring into a home, then you ought to educate yourself about this problem. It’s not pretty. Homes have been destroyed. Countless lives have

been lost. While billboards depict some “man of distinction” holding his alcohol and acting as if this is the life, the ads won’t show the highway wrecks (not something you would have seen in the ancient world), the shed blood, the devastated homes and children, just because someone wanted to drink. We cannot afford to ignore the fact that alcohol consumption has done untold damage to families and society. You can justify drinking all you wish, and you can point to this or that passage that you think gives you the right, but why throw in with something that is both so unnecessary and so destructive in our modern context? If you are going to favor drinking, then you need to be familiar with the problems that can arise from it. You may think you can handle it, but what alcoholic today began drinking without thinking that he can handle it? You have to ask if that unnecessary risk of 1) starting down a path that may destroy you, your family, and others, and 2) influencing another that cannot handle it, is worth your public support. No non-drinker becomes a problem drinker until he starts drinking. But now why exactly does someone want to start drinking? Why today, and to what end?

6. The comparison between drinking alcohol and other “bad habits” just doesn’t work, unless we are talking about drugs that significantly alter sobriety and the ability to make sound judgments. There are plenty of those types of drugs, but comparing drinking to eating donuts is ludicrous. We aren’t just talking here about long-term health. We are talking about the immediate effects that destroy one’s sobriety and ability to think. Please don’t turn this issue into, “but there are lots of other sins and problems and one is just as bad as the other.” Some issues have the potential to effect far greater devastation and immediate consequence. Alcohol is one of those.

7. With the above principles in mind, here are some questions I ask myself:

Is it the right and wise thing to do today?

Will it glorify God today?

Will it strengthen my family?

Will it yield a proper influence on others today?

Will it keep my thinking sharp and focused on the Kingdom?

Will it enable my faith to grow stronger?

Will it do justice to all the passages teaching us to be sober-minded?

One might say, “You can apply those questions to many activities.” So be it. That doesn’t change the topic under consideration right now that involves something that has been proven to be so mind-altering, destructive, and deadly. The choices we make about this issue can, in the most literal sense, mean life or death. Can we say that drinking alcohol is wise in our modern context?

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit...”
(Ephesians 5:18). [Back to Table of Contents](#)

A SIDEBAR: Is it a Sin to be Unwise?

By Doy Moyer

Some ask this kind of question in response to the teaching that it is unwise to drink alcohol today. That is the wrong question. The bigger question is this: does a godly person want to willingly be unwise or skirt the edges of folly? If we can look at the warnings that God gives, know that it is unwise, but still want to do it anyway, then shouldn't we be questioning our attitude? This is not an issue on which God has said nothing. He is clear in His warnings.

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1).

“Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning” (Proverbs 9:9).

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (Proverbs 12:15).

Is it a sin to be unwise? Let's ask another question: is it righteous to ignore wisdom, especially over an issue that has been proven to destroy families and souls?

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Special Issue

ALCOHOL AND THE CHRISTIAN

By Mark Roberts, editor

From a historical standpoint, Christians and alcohol never mixed. Yes, some denominations embraced alcohol (the Roman Catholic church owns many wineries) but most people saw Christianity and the social and recreational use of alcohol as absolutely incompatible. Ask most anybody and they would say “Christians don’t drink” or at least “Christians are not supposed to drink.”

What people have always believed is clearly not our standard. Yet, if there were good and sound and scriptural reasons for that belief then it is alarming to see that thinking change. To be sure, religious people, even brethren, are changing their views on social drinking. Several widely known “pastors” have announced that it is okay for Christians to drink alcohol. The old saw about “the Bible only condemns drunkenness, not drinking” is making the rounds again. Posts and articles on social media with provocative titles like “What the Bible really says about alcohol” are seeking to re-do everyone’s understanding of alcohol and are pushing a permissive agenda. Some preachers have even had a beer in the pulpit!

This issue of *Pressing On* seeks to take on this new thinking about alcohol and Christianity’s compatibility. We urge every reader to put aside what they may have been told or heard about this issue, and to instead open their Bible and determine to think and re-think this issue. Our goal in this issue is to thoroughly examine and understand the issue of alcohol, social drinking, and what the Bible calls for disciples to do on this matter. The writers assembled here have distinguished themselves with top notch, careful study and writing. You will be benefited for thinking along with them on this controversial matter.

Let’s examine what the Scriptures say so that we can press on to holiness, righteousness and the sober-minded pursuit of our Lord and His will.

--Mark

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Special Issue

A LOOK AT THE PROBLEM OF “SOCIAL” DRINKING

By Steve Klein

There is a prevalent illusion in our society that moderate social drinking is harmless. A number of Christians believe this illusion to be true. Is social drinking really just a harmless personal choice?

The truth is that social drinking is a problem for society and for souls. Sadly, alcohol often deceives the casual user into thinking he is not adversely affected by it, and that it will alleviate problems and make life more enjoyable. In this way, countless souls have been “*led astray*” by alcohol (Proverbs 20:1). As we shall see, social drinking solves few problems but leads to many.

What constitutes “Social Drinking”?

For the purposes of this discussion, *social drinking* involves drinking alcohol in social and recreational settings, whether with friends after work, at a party, at a restaurant, or while watching a ballgame.

The Bible term that comes closest to what we refer to as “social drinking” is the term “drinking parties” (1 Peter 4:3, NKJV). “Drinking parties” literally refers to “a drinking” without reference to amount. While casual moderate drinking is accepted in the world, it is one of the things that a Christian must leave behind (1 Peter 4:3-5).

The Social Costs of Social Drinking: A Needed Reality Check!

Acceptance of social drinking is engrained in our culture. Commercials and television shows make it look enjoyable and acceptable. Many Americans consider themselves to be “responsible” social drinkers, but nearly all of these would admit that there are times when they have had “too much to drink.” That should tell us something!

We desperately need a reality check. We are living in a world of make-believe if we think that social drinking is harmless!

Here are some ***sobering*** facts about the effects of alcohol in our society!

- **Connection to Crime.** Nearly 40% of prison inmates serving time for a violent offense admit to being under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offense.¹
- **Negative effects on the home and personal life.** There is a direct connection between drinking and domestic violence. Studies have also shown

that the more you drink, the more likely you are to get divorced.² Risky sexual behavior and unintended pregnancies are known to have a high correlation to alcohol consumption. Research has consistently shown that drinking negatively impacts job performance and employability, and is a major factor in on-the-job injuries.^{3 4}

- **Health risks.** According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the “*use of alcohol is a causal factor in more than 60 major types of diseases and injuries and results in approximately 2.5 million deaths each year.*”

Of course, some claim that drinking alcohol in moderation is actually healthy. But according to WHO, “*If we take into consideration the beneficial impact of low risk alcohol use in some diseases and in some population groups, the total number of deaths attributable to alcohol consumption was estimated to be 2.25 million in 2004. This accounts for more deaths than caused by HIV/AIDS or tuberculosis. Alcohol ranks eighth among global risk factors for death, while it is the third leading global risk factor for disease and disability.*”⁵

These are real life consequences of drinking. In many cases, these “consequences” involve other sinful behaviors.

The Spiritual Costs of Social Drinking

The Wide Gate to the Sin of Drunkenness. “Problem drinking” is just another term for the sin of drunkenness. Problem drinking is a problem in America! According to a 2015 report in *JAMA Psychiatry*, “*About 14 percent of adults, or nearly 33 million nationally, were current or recent problem drinkers. Thirty percent — almost 69 million — had been problem drinkers at some point in their lives.*”

As a work of the flesh, we all understand that drunkenness is a sin that will keep folks out of heaven (Galatians 5:21, 1 Corinthians 6:11). All else aside, surely anyone can see that drinking is what leads to drunkenness! Here’s a simple axiom: ***Every person who has ever gotten drunk started by drinking a little.*** Even if social drinking were not a sin in and of itself, it is the slippery slope to intoxication.

Becoming intoxicated is a process. At what point does one become drunk? If someone has had a drink or two, are they clear headed enough to know when to stop? Social drinkers who boast that their own good intentions and self-control will enable them to avoid getting drunk are simply self-deceived. Even righteous people with extraordinary conviction and self-control have been ensnared! Consider Noah (Genesis 9:21), or righteous Lot (2 Peter 2:8; Genesis 19:30-36).

Jesus commanded us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:13). Is it possible for a person to sincerely pray that prayer and be a social drinker, realizing that drinking is what *led* every drunk who ever got drunk to commit the sin of drunkenness?

Social drinking and self-control. Christians are to practice “self-control” (2 Peter 1:6). Alcohol takes away self-control! You don't need to drink much alcohol before your ability to drive becomes impaired. Impairment in judgment begins at a blood alcohol level of as little as .02%. That’s basically one beer for a 160-pound man with an empty stomach. How much alcohol does it take to cause a Christian’s praying skills or parenting skills to be impaired? At what point do you begin to make unwise and unrighteous choices?

On March 8, 2015, I received a phone call from a young man in jail in Texas. He called me after having been shot during a domestic altercation with his girlfriend which occurred after both had been drinking. He’d been treated for his wound, arrested and incarcerated. He later told me that he wanted to stop drinking because he realized that it removes his inhibitions and self-control. I knew this young man well. He had been taught that drinking was wrong from his youth; his parents did not drink, and he was never around social drinkers growing up. But, not long after leaving home as a young adult, he began buying beer and drinking at home. Some Christian had told him that the Bible doesn’t condemn social drinking. So, after a while, he began to drink with buddies socially after work. Later, his drinking played a part in leading him to become involved in sins that ultimately caused him to lose his family to divorce. This young man is in a sad spiritual condition. I have prayed many prayers and cried many tears for him. He is my son.

His story is not much different from the stories of millions of others whose spiritual lives are in shambles thanks to social drinking. It is anything but harmless. Don’t be led astray.

Endnotes

¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Alcohol and crime*. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ac.pdf>

² National Institutes of Health. *Alcohol consumption and divorce rates in the United States*. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10487734>

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⁴ National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, *Alcohol and the Workplace*. <https://ncadd.org/learn-about-alcohol/workplace/204-workplace>

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Special Issue

JESUS AND WINE

By Greg Gwin

Jesus is, of course, our perfect example in all things (1 Peter 2:21). That being the case, what He taught and what He practiced about the use of alcohol is a pattern we should honor, respect, and follow. If it can be established that He approved the use of alcohol – perhaps even promoted its use - then we cannot reasonably oppose it. In fact, we should embrace it. If, on the other hand, we find no such support in His example or teaching then we are right to teach strongly against it.

There are a few references to wine and alcohol in the life of Jesus that have served as battlegrounds in the discussion of ‘social drinking.’ One of the most popular of the supposed evidences that Jesus approved of social drinking is the occasion of the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee. Those hoping to find justification for ‘social drinking’ rush to this text (John 2:1-11). In analyzing it, we must remember that the Greek word ‘oinos’ is a generic word and can have reference to all kinds of wine, in all stages, fermented and unfermented, intoxicating and non-intoxicating. We must determine the type of wine that Jesus made by examining the context, the occasion, and all the attendant circumstances. Jesus’ character and the resulting influence of this act must also be considered.

The ruler of the feast said: *“Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.”* (John 2:10). Some claim that the expression “well drunk” proves that the wine at the wedding feast was intoxicating alcoholic wine, and that Jesus made more of the same. While the word translated “drunk” (methuo) can, and often does, mean ‘intoxicated, inebriated’, it can also mean ‘satiated, full’. Both Jim McGuiggan¹ and Samuel Bacchiocchi² note this usage. Others would argue that when the ruler of the feast called what Jesus had miraculously produced “the good wine” that he was implying that it had a higher alcoholic content and, thus, was more intoxicating. Logic dictates that the ruler of the feast would not be able to immediately distinguish the intoxicating power of the wine Jesus made, but he could instantly judge its taste. It was “good wine” because of its superior taste.

Certainly, we must consider the quantity of wine Jesus produced and the moral implications of His actions. The “six waterpots of stone” that Jesus instructed to be filled with water held “two or three firkins apiece” (John 2:6,7). A firkin is “8.6696 gallons, and consequently the amount of liquid in six stone jars . . . would exceed 110 gallons.”³ Other estimates are even higher, but regardless of the conversion factor used, the implication is clear. If the guests were already intoxicated, and Jesus made

huge quantities of wine that was even more intoxicating than what they had before, He was sinning by contributing to their drunkenness (Habakkuk 2:15). Taking all things into consideration, one must conclude that the wine Jesus made was not intoxicating.

Moving on, some believe they have found their desired proof for drinking alcohol in Luke 7:33-35: *“For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!”* For instance, Kenneth Gentry said: *“Jesus himself drank wine. As a matter of fact, in Luke 7:33-35 he makes reference to his practice of drinking wine as a vivid illustration of a distinctive difference between himself and his forerunner, John the Baptist”*.⁴

However, the context of this accusation shows that Jesus was dealing with adversaries who would never be content and would always find fault. They were seeking to destroy His influence and example. They were not accusing Him of ‘moderate social drinking’ of alcoholic wine. They were accusing Him of unrighteous conduct (‘winebibber’ literally means ‘a tippler, a drunkard’⁵). John (most agree) lived as a Nazarite (Luke 1:15). As such, he would consume nothing produced from the grape vine. This would even include non-fermented wine/grape juice (Numbers 6:3-4). Jesus acknowledged the fact that His conduct was different when He conceded that He “came eating and drinking.” This would certainly demonstrate that He drank wine - but not all sorts of wine - and could not be used to prove conclusively that He ever drank intoxicating wine.

Finally, another argument frequently offered involves Jesus’ reference to new wine and old bottles. *“Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved”* (Matthew 9:17). This statement is used in an attempt to prove that there was no way to preserve unfermented grape juice. The argument is that new wine (unfermented grape juice) was always put into new skins so that the skins would be able to allow for the expanding gases produced during fermentation. Old skins, it is argued, would already have been stretched to their limit and would burst from the pressures of fermenting juice. But the fact is that neither new nor old wineskins, when sealed, could withstand the pressure formed during fermentation. One cubic inch of sugar transformed into carbonic gas (the gas produced during fermentation) takes up to 40 times more volume.⁶ There is a Biblical statement that confirms this reality in Job 32:19: *“Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles.”* Actually, new wine was put into new bottles to prevent it from fermenting. Old wineskins would have contaminants that would provoke fermentation of the new wine placed inside – and the skins would burst. Notice this secular reference: *“When it was desired to preserve a quantity in the sweet state, an amphora was taken and coated with pitch within and without; it was filled . . . and corked, so as to be perfectly airtight.”*⁷ Clearly, Jesus’ statement about new wine in old bottles fails to prove what is intended by the social drinking crowd.

We must conclude that there is nothing in the personal example or in the specific teaching of Jesus that would serve to justify the consumption of alcoholic wine or intoxicating drink.

Endnotes

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- ⁵ "Winebibber," in *The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles*, p. 2433
- ⁶ Lees, Frederic Richard & Burns, Dawson, *Temperance Bible Commentary*, Nabu Press (2010), p. 35
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Special Issue

WINE AND THE EARLY CHURCH: SIX PASSAGES EXAMINED

By Brett Hogland

Does the New Testament provide authority for social or moderate drinking of alcohol? Let us remember that “whatever we do” as children of God and servants of Christ, we must “do all in the name of the Lord” (**Colossians 3:17**). Let us also realize that the burden of proof is not upon us to find where a thing is explicitly condemned in God’s word, but rather, the burden of proof is upon the one advocating a doctrine or practice, to find where that doctrine or practice is positively *authorized* in God’s word. In other words, where is the scriptural authority for social or moderate consumption of intoxicating beverage?

We will consider six passages of scripture that are often raised as authority for social or moderate drinking.

Acts 2:13-15

¹³“Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine.’ ¹⁴But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them... ¹⁵...these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.”

Some would argue that Peter only denied being drunk but didn’t deny drinking in moderation, therefore it is necessarily implied that Peter and the disciples drank. This argument is based on the idea that “Silence Implies Consent” – i.e. “*Peter denied drunkenness but he didn’t deny or condemn moderate drinking.*” The Bible clearly teaches that silence limits – it does not give consent or authority (Acts 15:24; Hebrews 7:14). A thing does not have to be explicitly condemned to be sinful – just not authorized!

On one occasion (John 7:20) Jesus’ enemies said “You have a demon!” Jesus didn’t deny that He had a demon on that occasion, He simply addressed the problem behind their unfounded accusation. Did His silence concerning the ridiculous accusation of demon-possession necessarily imply that He *did* have demon? Certainly not! It is even more unreasonable to conclude that Peter was a social drinker because he didn’t deny moderate drinking when he was unreasonably accused of drunkenness! There is no authority for social or moderate drinking in Acts 2:13.

Romans 14:21

“It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.”

This chapter addresses issues where a Christian’s conscience was stricter on certain matters than God was (i.e. eating meats or observing days). It is made clear in verses 3-6 and in verse 14 that the issues addressed were matters of indifference to God – He “received” the one who ate and He also “received” the one who did not eat. The context of this chapter is clearly limited to “all things” that “indeed are pure” (v.20); “nothing” that is “unclean of itself” (v.14); things that are “good” (v.16); things that can be done “to the Lord” (v.6). Does alcoholic beverage fit within this list? Can we point to a liquor store and tell our children that “all things” in that liquor store are “indeed pure”; that “nothing” in that store that is beverage alcohol is “unclean”; Or that every alcoholic beverage in there is “good” and that as Christians we can stop at the liquor store, buy a beer and drink it “to the Lord”? As the saying goes, “What proves too much proves nothing at all...” Alcoholic wine does not fit this context.

There is nothing in the context that would necessitate or prove that the “wine” in this context contains alcohol. The word translated “wine” (oinos) is a general word like fruit or groceries, and can refer to grape juice in any state or condition – fresh or fermented. Grape juice will certainly fit the context, just as meat does, but alcohol does not fit this context and is not authorized in Romans 14:21.

1 Timothy 3:8

“Likewise deacons must be... not given to much wine...”

Many assume that the prohibition from “much wine” necessarily implies the authorization for moderate drinking.

Does God necessarily imply authorization for the moderate by His condemnation of the extreme? When we test this method of interpretation with other scripture it proves to be a faulty method. Consider James 1:21, where the writer condemns the “overflow of wickedness.” Romans 6:12 says “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body.” Do these statements necessarily imply authority for a moderate amount of wickedness or sin in our life as long as the sin doesn’t control us? It is a false assumption to conclude that God authorizes the moderate simply by condemning the extreme.

It also needs to be pointed out that there is virtually no difference between the qualification of an elder and that of a deacon regarding wine. The elder is prohibited from being “*given to wine,*” and the word translated “given to wine” (paraoinos) is defined as “addicted” or “given to... much wine.” So while the word “much” is stated in verse 8 regarding deacons, it is implied by the definition in verse 3 regarding elders. There is virtually no difference in the qualifications and moderate drinking is in no way authorized by this condemnation.

Ephesians 5:18

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”

Once again, some people assume that the condemnation of drunkenness necessarily implies authority for moderate or social drinking. As was pointed out earlier, this principle of interpretation is unscriptural and will not provide legitimate authority. The only thing authorized in this statement is the pursuit of being filled with the Spirit.

It is interesting that it would be in this context – one exhorting us to be pure, to walk as children of light and to strive for wisdom in order to know God’s will – that some would seek to find authority for social consumption of something that God says will “bite like a serpent... sting like a viper” and cause one to lose discernment and wisdom (Proverbs 23:29-35; 31:4-7).

Verses 15-18 simply warn us that “dissipation” or reckless abandon is “in” wine and is antithetical to being filled with the Spirit (which includes the circumspect wisdom and understanding of God’s word).

1 Corinthians 11:21

“For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk.”

Once again, we have a mistaken effort to authorize the moderate by condemnation of the extreme.

Furthermore, this context is not a ruling on the consumption of alcohol in any way. As a matter of fact, the word “wine” is not even mentioned here. The confusion comes from the use of the word “drunk.” The word translated “drunk” (methyo) does not necessarily mean “inebriation.” The same word is used in the Septuagint in Isaiah 34:5 – *“For My sword is satiated in heaven...”* (NASB). It is also used in Isaiah 58:11 – *“You shall be like a well watered garden...”*. The word literally conveys the idea of being “filled” or “satiated.” Obviously, if one is filled with alcoholic beverage then they will be inebriated, but one can be filled with many things (grape juice, food, etc.) that do not cause inebriation.

Notice also that the word “drunk” is used in contrast to “hungry” – not “thirsty.” The point of the passage is that some were hungry (or empty – parallel with “those who have nothing” v.22) and others were satiated or full. This passage is not condemning, authorizing or discussing intoxication or any use whatsoever of alcoholic beverage.

1 Timothy 5:23

“No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.”

If there were ever a passage of scripture that authorized moderate drinking of alcohol, this would seem to come the closest on the surface, since Paul tells Timothy to *“use a little wine.”* Notice, though, that God specified the purpose for using *“a little wine”* – *“for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.”* The only authorized use of wine in this passage is medicinal use.

Make No Provision...

We have observed that the passages raised earlier did not provide authority for social drinking. But we also need to realize that social drinking is implicitly condemned in the New Testament through several other scriptural exhortations. Please consider two in particular.

Romans 13:13-14 exhorts us to *“put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”* Of all the contributing factors, drinking alcohol is possibly the single greatest *“provision”* for fleshly temptation, lying, filthy speech, sexual immorality, physical abuse, and more. How, in any honest mind, can we argue that drinking intoxicating beverage is authorized and that the only limit is a vague, subjective line of no drunkenness? Every sip of intoxicating beverage *“provides”* further and further for drunkenness and the lusts of the flesh! The scriptural injunction is to make *no provision* for such things. Therefore, any consumption of alcohol outside of medicinal use is prohibited in this passage.

1 Peter 2:11 exhorts us to *“abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”* The desire to drink alcohol is certainly a fleshly lust rather than a spiritual or wholesome desire. So does the consumption of alcohol *war against the soul*? When considering the connection between alcohol and filthy speech, sexual immorality, rape, child abuse, alcoholism, spiritual demise, etc., how can anyone reasonably deny the fact that alcohol *wars against the soul*? This scripture demands abstinence from such things, not moderate use! Drinking alcohol in any amount is implicitly condemned in this passage.

Please consider these passages with circumspect wisdom. *“Walk as children of light... finding out what is acceptable to the Lord... Awake you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light”* (Ephesians 5:8-17).

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Concerning Social Drinking

Can you say, “I drink alcoholic liquor because it makes me a stronger Christian? A better husband? A better wife? A better mother or father?”

Can you say, “I drink because it helps me in deciding what’s right and wrong?”

Can you say, “I drink because it makes me a more effective teacher of God’s Word and helps me to exert a strong influence for truth and right?”

Can you say, “I drink because it helps me to have more interest in spiritual things, like the study of God’s word or His worship?”

Can you say, “I drink because it makes my life richer, fuller and better in every way?”

Can you say, “I drink because I know that no harm can possibly come from it?”

Can you say, “I drink because I know that drinking is far better than total abstinence?”

Can you say, “I drink because I know the Lord wants me to?”

Alcohol and the Christian

By Ernest A. Finley



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Special Issue

DOES A “DON’T DRINK” GOSPEL HINDER EVANGELISM?

By Kyle Pope

RELEVANT is a religious online and print magazine published since 2002 targeting young evangelicals. Its Facebook page describes it as “the voice for spiritually passionate people” who are “20- and 30somethings... asking questions, seeking God, having fun and trying to impact the world around us.” In September 2014 RELAVANT posted an article by Preston Sprinkle, vice-president of the Boise Extension of Eternity Bible College, entitled “What Does the Bible Really Say About Alcohol?”¹ The article generated quite a bit discussion because it argued that drunkenness is the only thing Scripture condemns about drinking and those who advocate total abstinence are “pharisaical.” In a twist I had not personally heard before, Sprinkle argued that teaching abstinence actually impedes evangelism. He wrote:

A good chunk of the dying world that’s rejected Christianity hasn’t said no to Jesus, but no to a pharisaical version of Him. Some people have been turned off by the Gospel because they’ve thought that becoming a Christ-follower meant giving up having a beer with your friends after work. If this is the “good news” we preach, then the true beauty of a crucified and risen King will become covered in the fog of a man-made, pharisaical “don’t drink” gospel.

Jesus clearly taught the uselessness of “**teaching as doctrines the commandments of men**” (Matthew 15:9, NKJV), but is teaching a “don’t drink” message as part of obedience to the gospel truly man-made and pharisaical?

Is Drunkenness All That’s Condemned?

The basis of Sprinkle’s argument relies on some oversimplifications that sadly are now all too common in the religious world. Among these is the assertion that drunkenness is the only thing the Bible condemns about drinking. This is not accurate. In three passages drunkenness is paired with a word usually translated “**revelries**” that refers to celebratory drinking processions similar to Mardi Gras or tail-gate parties. Thayer defines its participants as “half drunken”—modern speech would put it, “they just have a buzz.” Although this is not drunkenness as we usually think of it Scripture condemns it (Romans 13:13; 1 Peter 4:3) warning that those who do it “**will not inherit the kingdom of God**” (Galatians 5:21). One of these passages adds a third word, translated “**drinking parties**” that it lists among things Christians left behind in coming to Christ (1 Peter 4:3). This word doesn’t infer any type of intoxication, but describes conduct more like the wedding reception where champagne is served, or the

back-yard cookout with cold beer shared among friends. Both “**revelries**” and “**drinking parties**” involve alcohol and both are condemned, but neither necessarily involves drunkenness as we would generally think of it.

Wine in the Ancient World

RELEVANT’s oversimplification is fueled by some false assumptions about ancient drinks. Sprinkle writes, “Some say that wine in the Bible was nothing more than grape juice and therefore neither Jesus nor the Biblical writers advocated drinking alcohol.” Some have made that argument, but that’s not the full picture. The fact is the Bible and ancient writers used terms translated “**wine**” much more broadly than we do today. We *only* use the word “wine” to refer to fermented, intoxicating drinks. Ancient and biblical writers used it to refer to every product of the grape from grape juice (Isa. 65:8; Deuteronomy 32:14; Num. 6:3, cf. Judg. 13:7; Genesis 40:11, cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 2.5.2) to vinegar (Matthew 27:34 NU; cf. John 19:29). This included fermented wine, but also drinks from grapes that were not intoxicating.

Sprinkle dismisses the ancient practice of dilution. He wrote, “Others say that wine was so diluted that it hardly contained any alcohol,” going on to assert that this cannot “be substantiated by what the Scriptures actually say.” It is correct that not all wine was diluted, and Scripture does not layout a recipe describing the preparation of various drinks, but the Bible was not written in a vacuum. It is abundantly clear that Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures regularly watered down wine (whether fermented or unfermented). They did this: 1) to extend its life; 2) to rehydrate boiled reduced wines, or 3) to inhibit intoxicating effects. This dilution ranged from proportions of 20/1 (Homer, *Odyssey* 9.208), 8/1 (Pliny, *Natural History* 14.6), or among the Jews 2 or 3/1 (Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 77a; *Pesachim* 108b). The apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees, written in the period between the Testaments claimed, “It is hurtful to drink wine or water alone... wine mingled with water is pleasant” (15:39). It is within this cultural background that we find biblical references to “**wine mixed with water**” (Isa. 1:22) and “**mingled wine**” (Song of Solomon 7:2, ASV)—using a word whose root means “to mingle (water with wine)” (BDB). The first clear description of the observance of the Lord’s Supper after the NT describes the memorial cup as “a cup of wine mixed with water” (Justin, *First Apology* 65). These facts are not the imagination of advocates of abstinence. They are part of the biblical and historical record.

Was All “Wine” Alcoholic?

Sprinkle acknowledges that “wine back then probably had a lower ABV [alcohol by volume content] than today’s stuff” but dismisses the significance of this, arguing “people were quite able to get smashed by drinking too much of it” adding, “Still, the Bible never says not to drink it.” There is no question there were alcoholic drinks in

Bible times, but sadly many modern scholars have ignored the abundance of evidence that ancient people knew how to preserve grape juice unfermented. This was done not only to avoid intoxication, but pagan writers describe adding “must” (i.e. unfermented grape juice) to fermented wine to improve its taste.

This preservation of unfermented wine was done in a variety of ways. One was simply filtering pressed grape juice. This process significantly reduced the yeasts present in grape skins—a substance necessary for alcoholic fermentation. The Roman writer Pliny the Elder claimed the most suitable drink for all men was wine, “with strength reduced by the filter,” even explaining the difference between “must” and fermented wine (*Natural History*, 23.24). The Greek writer Plutarch claimed that filtered wine has its “strike and madness taken away” leaving one in a “mild and healthy state of mind” (*Symposiacs*, 693b 3-5). Does the Bible refer to this practice? Yes. Isaiah speaks of “**wine on the lees, well-refined**” (Isa. 25:6, KJV, ASV). The word for “**well refined**” means, “to purify, distil, strain, refine” (BDB). The word translated “**wine on the lees**” literally means “something preserved” (Strong). Young’s Literal Translation rendered this “**preserved things refined.**” “Lees” (or “dregs”) in modern usage refers to sediment left after fermentation, but in Plutarch and Talmudic sources it referred to the residue from either the initial pressing of grapes or residue in later stages. Plutarch claimed filtering lees from an initial pressing prevented intoxication (*Symposiacs*, 692c 9-10). Sprinkle quotes this passage as “**well-aged wine**” (ESV, NLT) and then defines it himself as “the stuff I only notice on the top shelf but can never afford.” That makes the assumption that what the ancients considered *best* is what a modern liquor store would consider *best*. That is not necessarily the case.

A second way that grape juice was preserved unfermented was by boiling and reducing it. This concentrated the sugars into a jelly-like substance that would not ferment as easily. The Roman poet Virgil described housewives boiling down “sweet must” (*Georgics*, 1.295). The Mishnah records debates among Jews about whether boiled or unboiled wine should be used in the heave-offering (*Terumat* 11:1). While the Bible doesn’t refer directly to boiling, it is the reason in some cases that wines were diluted—to rehydrate reduced wines. In light of this, biblical references to dilution may indirectly refer to this process (cf. Isa. 1:22; Song of Solomon 7:2).

Neither of these techniques are difficult to perform. I have personally conducted an experiment to scientifically test these claims and found that filtering and boiling (with no refrigeration) rendered sealed grape juice non-alcoholic for as much as a year and a half.² Given the fact that ancient cultures practiced these techniques, yet referred to both “must” and fermented juice as “wine,” we cannot assume that every Biblical reference to wine was alcoholic.

The Meaning of “Strong Drink”

Sprinkle devotes an entire paragraph in his article to a discussion of the Hebrew word *shekar*, usually translated “**strong drink**.” He argues that *shekar* was simply “beer” and asserts, “*Shekar* had an ABV of around 6-12 percent,” going on to claim while the Bible prohibits its abuse:

In moderation, drinking beer was encouraged (Proverbs 31:6). In fact, Deuteronomy 14:26 actually commands Israelites to use some of their tithe money to buy some beers and celebrate before the Lord....They were also commanded to offer up two liters of beer to God six days a week and even more on the Sabbath (see Numbers 28:7-10).

Although Sprinkle doesn't mention it as a source influencing his view, his wording and argumentation is very similar to an article by Michael Homan that ran in *Biblical Archaeology Review* in 2010 entitled “Did The Ancient Israelites Drink Beer?” (36.5 (Sep/Oct 2010): 48–56, 78). Homan, like Sprinkle oversimplified the definition of *shekar*, equating it with the beers one might purchase in a modern liquor store. Six years earlier, however, in a version of virtually the same article in *Near Eastern Archaeology* Homan acknowledged that beers produced by one of the common ancient methods had an alcohol content of only 2-3% as opposed to modern beers of 5% and above (“Beer and Its Drinkers: An Ancient Near Eastern Love Story.” 67:2 (2004) 91). Ancient beers were often more like a porridge that one had to drink with a straw to filter out chaff. They were sometimes mixed with dates, honey, or spices and consumed by both adults and children. The ancient writer Xenophon even mentions that the strength of such beers would often be further diminished by adding water (*Anabasis* 4.5.26-27). In the early history of our own country something called “small beer,” or during prohibition a drink called *Bevo*, in a similar way were grain drinks that were not intoxicating. Even if we took *shekar* to refer to “beer,” we are clearly not talking about something equivalent to modern beers.

There are several problems, however with concluding that *shekar* was just a type of beer. First, Leviticus 2:11 prohibited offerings on the altar that contained “**leaven**.” The Talmud considered beer made from barley “leavened” (*Pesachim* 42a-b), and considered barley one of five grains subject to leaven restrictions (*Menachoth* 70a-b). Second, the Dead Sea Scroll known as *The Temple Scroll*, in a probable reference to the drink offering, declares, “pour out a libation of *shekar*, new wine, on the altar of the Lord, year by year” (3QT 21.10). Here *shekar* is used in a synonymous parallelism with “new wine.” That suggests that *shekar* (like other terms for wine) can be used broadly of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks and may simply be a generic term that sometimes included drinks from things other than just grapes. The unfortunate translation “**strong drink**” although common, is misleading. The process of distillation producing high alcoholic content drinks such as Vodkas or Everclear was not known in ancient times. That means that even the highest content alcoholic drinks of the ancient world were not like the fortified and distilled drinks of our day.³

Wine as a Blessing from God

Sprinkle also devotes a significant amount of time to considering passages where wine is described as a blessing from God. He writes:

Under the old covenant, wine is a blessing (Deuteronomy 7:13; 11:14) and the absence of wine a curse (28:39, 51). When Israel looked to the future, God promises to flood them wine flowing from the mountaintops (Amos 9:14; Joel 3:18) and vats brimming with fresh wine (Joel 2:19, 24).

Sprinkle is correct that “**wine**” is spoken of as a blessing, and in some of these passages the generic term *yayin* is used (Deuteronomy 28:39, Amos 9:14). I wish Sprinkle, however, had pointed out that in most of these passages the Holy Spirit does not use the generic term. Most use the word *tirosh* often translated “**new wine**” (Deuteronomy 7:13; 11:14; 28:51; Joel 2:19, 24)—defined as “wine, fresh or new wine, **MUST, FRESHLY PRESSED WINE**” (BDB, emphasis mine). One uses the word *asis* also translated “**new wine**” (Joel 3:18)—defined as “sweet wine, wine, **PRESSED OUT JUICE**” (BDB, emphasis mine). These passages are speaking of the natural produce of the vine as a blessing from of God—not the results of alcoholic fermentation.

What Christians Ought to Be

Sprinkle ends his article with some warnings to those he calls “young, restless, and slightly inebriated libertines” whom he claims “celebrate their freedom without discipline.” While I would differ with his assertion that drinking alcohol is a “freedom,” I am even more concerned that he treats so lightly the statement that these “libertines” (whom he claims are doing “great things for the Kingdom”) are “slightly inebriated.” To determine that the Bible says about alcohol we must not only look at what the Bible prohibits but also what it commands.

Throughout the NT Christians are commanded to be “**sober**” and “**temperate**.” The word *nehpaleos* (or *nephalios*) various translated as “**vigilant**” or “**temperate**” means “abstaining from wine” (Thayer). It is used three times of elders (1 Timothy 3:2), elders and deacon’s wives (1 Timothy 3:11) and older men (Titus 2:2). The Greeks applied this word to wine-less offerings. The word translated “**temperate**” in 1 Corinthians 9:25 is “drawn from athletes, who in preparing themselves for the games abstained from unwholesome food, wine, and sexual indulgence” (Thayer). A qualification for elders is that they are “**not given to wine**” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)—from a word that literally means “beside wine.” Deacons and older women are commanded to be “**not given to much wine**” (1 Timothy 3:8; Titus 2:3)—which is just another way of saying “**not given to wine**”—it is not an allowance to be “slightly inebriated.”

So how would those living in an agricultural society, before the time of detailed product labeling and the FDA fulfill these commands? They would take measures to guarantee

that the drinks they consumed would not impair their sobriety. They would do this by either taking steps to prevent new wine from fermenting or watering it down if they feared that it already had. Today we may fulfill these commands by simply abstaining from any drink that is clearly identified as an intoxicant.

In Christ all Christians are considered priests who regularly offer-up “**spiritual sacrifices**” to God (1 Peter 2:5; cf. Romans 12:1). How can we ignore that under Mosaic Law priests during their time of service were to refrain drinking altogether in order to “**distinguish between holy and unholy**” (Lev. 10:8-11). Is the priestly service of Christians of less importance? I appreciate that Sprinkle ends article with a word of caution, but to do so after devoting the bulk of his article to encouraging the drinking of alcohol is like telling someone to avoid lust after encouraging them to use pornography.

Drinking and Evangelism

I have no doubt that some do not obey the gospel because they want to drink alcohol. Unfortunately, the same is true of other sins such as sexual immorality, theft, dishonesty, murder, or covetousness. Each of these things set our own desires in conflict with the will of God. Jesus said, “**If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me**” (Matthew 16:24). Yes, we must never create man-made laws where God has not spoken, but neither should we weaken the demands Scripture has set in order to win converts. When all of the teachings of the New Testament are taken into consideration the clear evidence is that Christians should abstain from all intoxicants except when used for medicinal purposes (cf. 1 Timothy 5:23; Proverbs 31:6).

Endnotes

¹ <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/life/what-does-bible-really-say-about-alcohol>

² The complete report of this experiment is available at:
<http://www.ancientroadpublications.com/Studies/BiblicalStudies/GrapeJuiceTest.html>

³ For more on Homan’s articles and the meaning of *shekar* see my study “Beer in the Bible?” available at:
<http://www.ancientroadpublications.com/Studies/BiblicalStudies/BeerintheBible.html>

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Special Issue

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRISTIANS DRINK SOCIALLY?

By Josh Creel

I couldn't believe that Denver had won the Super Bowl! I was rooting for Peyton Manning and the Broncos, but I had little expectation that they would win. Carolina looked to be the better team by far, and Peyton was looking washed up. But, despite the odds, Peyton and the Broncos won. I was thrilled, that is until Peyton gave his post-game interview: "I want to go kiss my wife and my kids. I want to go hug my family. *I'm going to drink a lot of Budweiser tonight...* I promise you that. I'm going to take care of those things first. I'm definitely going to say a little prayer, thank the man upstairs for this great opportunity. I'm just very grateful." How could one of my all-time favorite players stoop to shilling for a beer company during one of the greatest moments in his career? And how could he go from "drinking a lot of Budweiser" to thanking "the man upstairs"? The two seem incompatible!

For some time now many Christians have been doing the same thing; praising and worshipping Jesus as their Lord and Savior while regularly drinking alcohol at home and/or in social settings. Many Christians, myself included, believe that Christianity and drinking are incompatible, but others do not share that view. The reasons given for drinking are varied and several articles within this publication have addressed these. Perhaps you remain unconvinced by the discussion of the differences in alcoholic beverages in Bible times and alcoholic beverages now. Perhaps you view the Bible's warnings against drinking as only applying to drunkenness. Maybe you intend to continue practicing your faith *and* drinking in social and recreational settings. Before you do, please ask yourself the following question: "what happens when I drink socially?" And please consider these possible answers...

When Christians drink socially they support a great evil.

The Super Bowl always contains a number of commercials for beer and other alcoholic beverages. They are often some of the funniest, best produced and memorable ones we see during the game. This year had all the kinds of commercials we have come to expect, but there was one commercial that stood out for its different approach and tone. It was a commercial for Budweiser starring the actress Helen Mirren, a commercial where she never encouraged the viewer to buy Budweiser, rather she belittled anyone who would drive while drunk. The commercial was widely praised for its message and sensibilities. I found it to be revolting! 28 people die every day in America as a result of drunk driving crashes.¹ Twenty-eight. Die. Every. Day. Budweiser's product is one of the main culprits

in those 28 deaths each day, so I'd have a lot more respect for Budweiser if instead of lecturing people on drunk driving, they would quit making beer.

Drinking alcohol is one of the great ills of our society. Its rotten fruits include suicide, violent crime, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, poor workplace and school performance, etc. Maybe you're one of the fortunate ones who drinks only moderately and you've never been adversely affected by alcohol. Consider yourself fortunate because untold millions have been negatively affected by this cancer on our society. And your participation in drinking contributes to an industry that wrecks lives. Please, seriously consider the warning of Scripture: "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them" (Ephesians 5.11 [2](#)).

When Christians drink socially they give off some unintended signals.

First, they send the signal that the Father's warnings aren't that serious. No, they don't mean to send this signal. They love God and they believe we ought to follow Him. And while they claim to heed His warnings against drunkenness, they signal to others that alcohol, if taken in moderation, is harmless. I fear that they have not properly considered all of the Father's warnings on this. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Proverbs 20.1 ESV). "Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper" (Proverbs 23.31-32).

Second, they send the signal that enslavement isn't that big a concern. Again, they do not intend to send this signal, but it is given nonetheless. They know that addiction is a struggle for many and they profess that they would quit drinking if it becomes a problem. But since it's not a problem for them yet, they will continue to drink. Such an attitude is a far cry from Paul's statement that "all things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything" (1Corinthians 6.12) and "just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification" (Romans 6.19). Facts are that enslavement may only be a few drinks away. If we are enslaved to anything, let it be to righteousness!

Third, they send the signal that our highest aim is *not* the Father's glory. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1Corinthians 6.19-20). Can I glorify God by participating in an activity that has destroyed the lives of so many? I cannot see a way to answer that question in the affirmative. So, if you choose to drink it will be for your own reasons and not the Father's glory.

When Christians drink they show little concern for the souls of others.

Maybe you are indeed one of those lucky ones that can drink only in moderation. Maybe it will never affect your health or ruin a single relationship. If only everyone else was so fortunate. “It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles” (Romans 14.21). Maybe if my brethren took the 1:00 AM phone calls from the spouse whose husband has been drinking, they would think differently. Or, if they counseled the teen that’s been expelled from school for having vodka in his locker, they would see just how vile this stuff is. My brethren, think of these souls before you partake in this great evil.

What happens when a Christian drinks socially? In short, nothing good.

Endnotes

¹ <http://www.madd.org/drunk-driving/about/drunk-driving-statistics.html>

² All Scripture taken from NASB95 unless otherwise noted.

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Special Issue

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SOBER?

By David Banning

Are you sober?

This is a question we would expect to hear a police officer ask a driver who he believes is driving drunk. The word "sober" has a very narrow meaning for us. We use it almost exclusively to describe a person who is free from the influence of alcohol. However, in Scripture this word has a broader meaning. It can certainly include the idea of being free from intoxication. But to be sober can also mean that you are thinking straight; that you are sensible. It sometimes carries the idea of having your passions and desires under control; that you are self-disciplined (Titus 2:12). It might also describe a person who is careful and cautious (1 Peter 5:8). So, are you sober?

Any serious disciple can quickly see the value of this quality. Think again about Peter's warning (1 Peter 5:8). Every day we face a terrible enemy who is seeking to destroy us. He employs a vast array of tactics to lure us away from God. He is relentless. This is no trivial matter; it is life's greatest struggle. Eternity is at stake. For this reason, we must go out every day ready for battle; we need to be sober! We need to be on guard and cautious, keenly aware of the danger we face. We need a sound mind and clear thinking so we can size up the devil's work and see it for what it is. We need inner strength and self-discipline to control our passions and desires when Satan uses these to pull us into sin. In light of these realities, it is no surprise that Paul tells us to "live sensibly" (soberly) in this present age (Titus 2:12). Do you go out every day ready for battle? Are you sober?

If we can appreciate the value of this quality, then it will not be hard to see why drinking alcohol is a really bad idea. The problem with alcohol is that it messes with our minds and robs us of our sobriety (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35). It gradually takes away our ability to think straight and control our passions. It lowers our sensitivity to danger and makes us less cautious. In other words, the more we drink, the less sober we become.

It needs to be emphasized that this problem begins early in the drinking process. Many factors must be considered when discussing how alcohol affects the mind. Gender, weight, experience with alcohol, medications, time between drinks, what you are drinking, food intake ... all of these influence alcohol's impact. But with that being said, we should appreciate that even small amounts of alcohol (like 1-2 beers) begin to influence the mind. Inhibitions start to come down, emotions are intensified and judgment about continued drinking starts to be effected. This helps explain how people who were intending to go out for a couple of drinks sometimes end up "passed out

drunk.” The more they had, the less they were able to make good decisions about having more. Even small amounts of alcohol affect the mind. It comes as no surprise that the National Transportation and Safety Board (NTSB) has advocated lowering the legal blood alcohol limit from .08 to .05. This effort has been met with protest from people who complain that, if implemented, some will be legally drunk after *only one drink!* Perhaps the better reaction would be to appreciate the danger. This is not the opinion of a group of old preachers. It is people charged with protecting us when we travel who are saying that even small amounts of alcohol make it unsafe to drive. Why? It affects the mind. It is interesting that many alcohol impairment charts list zero drinks as the only safe amount for those who are driving.

Some will certainly take issue with the claims in the preceding paragraph. A simple Google search for “alcohol impairment charts” will confirm most of the information. Check it out. This is an issue that deserves careful research.

What does this mean for disciples? It is unfortunate that much of the discussion about alcohol has come down to one, narrow issue: Can you prove it is a sin to have one beer or one glass of wine? I fear that this question often comes from people who *want* to be part of the drinking crowd and have already made up their minds. When someone really *wants* to do something, they will find a path to justify it. By contrast, people who live to exalt Jesus (Philippians 1:20) ask different questions when faced with moral choices: What does God want (Colossians 1:9-10)? What will bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)? Will this enhance my ability to reflect Christ and bring others to Him (Matthew 5:13-16)? Is this wise (Ephesians 5:15-16)?

Asking these questions will cause us to process our decision about alcohol in a completely different way. Think about it: if I’m determined to live my life to God’s glory, when is it ever a good idea to drink something that diminishes my sobriety? When would it ever be the wise choice to reduce our caution or lower our inhibitions, even a little bit? If my teenage son were out with friends from school on a Friday night, would I want him to drink something that made him less cautious? If my granddaughter is off at college and friends persuade her to attend a frat party, would I want her to drink something that lowered her inhibitions? If a husband were away from his family on a business trip, would it be wise to sit in a hotel bar and drink something that diminishes his self-control? These examples are not imagined. An endless array of ugly, true stories could be attached to everyone. The path to disaster is easier to travel when we allow alcohol to erode the safeguards that protect us from it ... sound mind, self-control, caution.

It is time to grow up. We must stop processing this critical issue like spiritual adolescents and start thinking like mature disciples. We need to move beyond this silly quibble about whether it is technically a sin to have one beer. We are at war with Satan. Everything hinges on the outcome of this great struggle. We need every ounce of

caution, self-discipline and good sense that we can muster to fight the enemy. I should not sacrifice even the smallest amount for the sake of a drink. I need to be sober.

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Now and Then

WHICH IS EMPTY? BELIEF OR UNBELIEF?

By Chuck Durham

In 67 B.C., Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey) began a four year conquest of what remained of the Greek Seleucid Empire. During this campaign he subjugated the Judean state which had won their independence from the Seleucids a century earlier. Carl J. Richard writes of this: “Thousands of Jews threw themselves to the ground before Pompey and begged him not to desecrate the Great Temple of Jerusalem by entering it since no Gentile could enter the temple without desecrating it. This display only convinced Pompey that the temple must contain great riches, so he barged in, even marching into the Holy of Holies, its innermost sanctum. The Roman historian Tacitus later declared: ‘It is a fact well known that he found no image, no statue, no symbolical representation of the Deity; the whole presented a naked dome; the sanctuary was unadorned and simple.’ When the dumbfounded Pompey emerged from the temple, he exclaimed in wonder, ‘It is empty; there is nothing there but darkness.’ Pompey’s reaction typified Roman confusion concerning the Jews and their worship of an invisible, omnipotent God” (Twelve Greeks and Romans Who Changed the World, 169).

Faith Is the Evidence of Things Not Seen (Hebrews 11:1). Verse 3 says: “...the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” The unbeliever will always be baffled by the supposed naiveté of the believer. How can one seriously believe in an omnipotent, unseen God? To people who live with eyes only for things seen, they cannot possibly understand the believer’s mindset. The believer (see Romans 1:20) clearly sees the invisible attributes of God (His eternal power and Deity) by the things which are made in the Creation. “Nothing comes from nothing” is an irrefutable axiom. Something must have always existed in order to produce the complex universe in which we live. How did it all become what it is? By chance? The very essence of the believer’s faith is disorienting to the unbeliever. The believer lives for the world of the unseen; not for the things which are seen (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:18). The one is eternal and permanent; the other as ephemeral as water in a desert. Until one overcomes this hurdle they can never be a believer and move toward the greater goals of redemption and sanctification. To those who are perishing – the Gospel is veiled: “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:4). All modern Pompey’s are just as dumbfounded upon emerging from God’s Sanctuary. “The word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Hebrews 4:4b).

Men Love Darkness Rather Than Light (John 3:19). We cannot help those who will not hate the darkness. If a man concludes a study of God's word still unmoved and unshaken, he cannot be helped. We must always live holy lives before them, in the hope that something will jar them awake, but we must not live under any false hopes. Winston Churchill's son, Randolph, was once challenged that he could not read the entire Bible in a fortnight. According to Evelyn Waugh, it did not have the desired effect. "He has never read any of it before and is hideously excited; keeps reading quotations aloud...or merely slapping his side and chortling "God, isn't God a crock!" (in Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 51 [I substituted a less offensive word for the more blasphemous thing he actually said!]). How can we help such a man come to the saving knowledge of the truth? We don't—plain and simple! For those who put darkness for light and light for darkness (cf. Isaiah 5:20)—their minds are too warped and are beyond the pale of redemption. One can wander so far into the vileness of Satan's kingdom as to never find his way back out. Like the Pharisees, who were in utter darkness, they say, "We see!" and their sin remains (cf. John 9:41). All modern Pompey's emerge from God's Sanctuary saying: "It is empty; nothing but darkness." Like mad Gadarene pigs they plummet off the cliff to their doom. Remember—we are looking for those who are looking.

Love True Riches, Not Uncertain Riches (Luke 16:11; 1 Timothy 6:17). Pompey utterly misread the Jewish appeal for him to not enter the Temple. He trusted in gold; they trusted in the riches of the unseen God. Pompey was filthy rich from pillaging the countries he conquered. His temple (his bank account) contained vast quantities of gold. Why didn't Jehovah's? Because all that is in this world is perishing, gold and silver included (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-11). If we trust in them, saying, "I am rich and have need of nothing;" then we truly are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (cf. Revelation 3:17). Pompey died wretchedly at the hands of Egyptian assassins while fleeing from Julius Caesar. Far too late were his eyes opened when he crossed over into the realm of God!

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From the Pasture

SHEPHERDS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

By Rusty Miller

It is actually a question asked quite often: “What are the elders doing to keep our young people from drifting into the world?”

In fact, it’s a question I often ask myself. Mostly it is asked out of frustration when we have “lost” a young person. All of us know that is precisely the wrong time to ask the question, and the frustration comes because it seems as if we have no influence whatsoever in this area. In this article, I want to examine whether or not that is true. What can elders do to influence our young people to avoid drinking?

First, we need to consider some of the qualifications for serving as an elder. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul says they must be “above reproach . . . sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable . . . well thought of by outsiders.” In Titus 1, he says they should be “above reproach . . . self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.”

For the purpose of our discussion, this means an elder must be an example to the flock. In the simplest terms, an elder can have no influence at all if they are worldly themselves. It is the same principle that Jesus taught in Matthew 7: “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (vv. 3-5).

Every shepherd must work first on himself, and then he will be able to teach, to admonish, and to convict those who are not walking according to the Scriptures. Our example as godly men can do more than most anything we say.

A second thing elders must do is to make sure our young people hear the truth. Whether it is in our Bible classes, our sermons or in private conversations, we need to be certain our young people are hearing God’s word as the alternative to the fallacious lifestyles the world holds up as admirable. We need to make sure that a relationship with God is seen as better, not just in the life to come, but right now. Help them to understand that when Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10), He was not talking about heaven. He meant that His followers would live a better life, no matter the obstacles, here on earth.

A more difficult area where shepherds can be effective is in dealing with those young people already starting down a path of sin and worldliness. Hard conversations may need to take place. If the young person is willing, individual Bible studies can be

conducted. In extreme cases, the church may need to take disciplinary action. We need to be willing to do the difficult things that may help bring those who are struggling back to the Lord.

Finally, an area that can help is to cultivate relationships with the parents of young people, so that they are quicker to reach out for help. Sadly, many times a young person is well down the path of worldliness before the problem ever reaches the elders. That makes it very difficult to then step in and make a real difference. I need to be better about developing the kinds of relationships that will cause parents to come earlier, reaching out and saying, "Please help me."

If you are reading this and you are not an elder, but instead a parent of young people, don't wait until your children have no interest in hearing from the elders. Reach out early and ask for help. We have parents who have done that and it has helped in some difficult situations.

The grimmest of all elders meetings have been those when we have been forced to deal with young people who have abandoned their faith. I need to be better in all of these areas to help combat Satan and insure that we are not faced with more of those meetings in the future.

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TO THE RESCUE!

By Dene Ward

After a hard day and a bad night, I was late getting up the other morning. Already behind, I decided to start a load of laundry before dressing. As I stood there in the laundry room I thought I heard someone outside calling from a long way off. I almost didn't—I was behind and did not need the interruption--but finally I opened the door. Calling is not the word. Screaming is more like it. "No! No! Oh nooooo!" a voice I finally realized was my neighbor's pierced the morning mist through the woods and across the creek.

As fast as I could, I pulled on a pair of jeans, grabbed a sweater, slipped on shoes, and put the cell phone in my pocket. Despite the early morning gloom of the woods, I made it to the creek without stumbling. Providence, surely, since I trip over everything now. Across the narrow stream the house stood quiet and peaceful. Either everything was okay, or everyone was already dead.

Not being one of those stupid girls in the horror movies who go down into the basement to check out the noise without a second thought, I stood there watching as I called on the cell. No answer. Well, that wasn't good. So I crossed the wooden bridge and opened the gate.

Now I had to be on the lookout as well for the Great Dane, whose ears peak at eyeball level on me. Not to mention the German shepherd and the blood hound. Finally I saw vague figures moving over by the stable in the field fenced off from the main yard. No one seemed frantic. So I slipped around the house expecting them to come around the other side any moment, but no one was there and no one showed up in the few seconds I waited.

As I turned to go back to the carport door I always use, the Dane in the house spotted me through the front window and his basso profundo bark rattled the walls. I knew no one had gotten into *that* house, so my heartbeat slowed a bit. My neighbor saw me herself then, and called from the back door. I had, indeed, gotten there after the excitement was over. Her husband had left before daylight, forgetting to put the two big outside dogs in the horse field before the men hired to do some tree work had arrived. She is 67 and shorter than I by three or four inches, but had tried to do it herself, and was knocked over by the happy, excited dogs and hit her head on the board fence. Another neighbor had gotten to her first, which was just as well. Only a man could have handled all those big, excited animals, and I think the hired men had to help him—that is who I had seen.

I thought, as I made my way back through the woods, as scared as I had been, I had not hesitated at all to go see about my neighbor. Yet how many times have I ignored the cries of distress from my neighbors whose souls are in jeopardy? No, they do not actually cry out. You see that distress in their eyes. You hear their desire for the peace you have in their questions, in their comments about how you handle problems better than they do.

But instead of opening the door to listen, we are too busy with everyday chores to even notice. We have our families to think about. We have our own problems. As one church told Keith a long time ago when he asked for a few dollars to print gospel meeting announcements and pass them out door to door, “They know where we are. They will come if they are interested. No need wasting the Lord’s money like that.”

Are we really listening to their calls for help? Will they be calling someone else because we didn’t pay good enough attention and were slow to react? Are we afraid we will waste “the Lord’s” money? Why do we think it is there? He certainly doesn’t need it.

Pay attention to those around you today. Be sure you are really listening.

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? Even as it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom 10:13-15).

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Truth Connection

IS ALL THIS JUST EXPECTED “PREACHER TALK?”

By Warren E. Berkley, Assistant Editor

Are preachers and “old fashioned” folk the only people who are against social drinking? Does this issue of **Pressing On** just repeat what is expected from preachers?

A few years ago I read an article in the McAllen Monitor (by Chelse Benham, May 23, 2004, page 1G), under the title: “**Cocktails & Contacts: Do They Mix?**”

The author said in the lead paragraph: “Social drinking is the number one acceptable drug of choice among Americans and it is the most commonly used and widely abused psychoactive drug in the country, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.” She also pointed out (quoting Health magazine): “Americans have a long history of ambivalence about the role of alcohol in their society.”

Then this: “...the business environment all but pours it (alcohol, *web*) down the throats of professionals in social settings.”

Next, citing a CNN report: “...many professionals use alcohol to ease into business conversations and transaction.” One CEO said: “There is tremendous pressure to indulge in alcohol on business-social occasions...It is a factor in building business relationships, or bonding.”

Michael Judge, reporter for the Wall Street Journal (WSJ.com) Web site: “Drinkers mind if one among them is not drinking. Like death, drink is a great leveler. Sobriety immediately introduces a hierarchy. So that your attitude may be adjusted to fall in line with theirs, sometimes other people all but require you to drink.”

Miguel Lopez, program coordinator for the University of Texas-Pan American’s Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program said: “Alcohol helps create a sense of belonging in a group, but this can also create a **false sense of security**. People **lean on alcohol** when they have less confidence in their social skills. They turn to ‘liquid power’ to be the type of person they may want to be, but don’t feel they are.” He calls this an “**artificial sense of empowerment**.” Further: “By saying ‘no’ to drinking alcohol in a social setting you’re not participating so you’re **an individual and not part of the crowd**. This can make the people around you self-conscious and they may apply pressure on you to drink. It takes someone who is well centered with themselves to say ‘no’ against social pressures!” Mr. Lopez is not a gospel preacher just repeating the “traditional line.” He has experience as a witness of what social drinking is about in reality, in the business world and on the college campus. *So are you an individual, or a part of the crowd?*

Truth Connection: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise,” (Proverbs 20:1).

[More about Chelse Benham here: <http://www.chelsebenham.com/>]



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