

# To Drink, or Not to Drink?

We drank for happiness and became unhappy.  
We drank for joy and became miserable.  
We drank for social ability and became argumentative.

We drank for sophistication and became obnoxious.  
We drank for friendship and made enemies.  
We drank for sleep and awakened without rest.  
We drank for strength and felt weak.  
We drank for medicinal purposes and lost our health.

We drank for relaxation and got the shakes.  
We drank for bravery and became afraid.  
We drank for freedom and became slaves.

We drank for confidence and become doubtful.  
We drank to make our conversations easier and it slurred our speech.

We drank to feel heavenly and ended up feeling like hell.

If you were to add up the devastating effects of heroin, cocaine, and marijuana, it still would be less than the damage done by alcohol every day in this country. Alcohol destroys more lives, more homes, more families, and more futures, than any other drug available. And yet still we struggle to say "no." We fall prey to the massive, hundred-million-dollar marketing campaigns aimed at convincing us that "everyone drinks," and that drinking somehow will loosen us up, make us cool, bring us the life we desire. Three in four adults in the United States consume alcohol regularly, and most likely, they started young; recent studies reveal that 72 percent of high-school students have consumed alcohol, and that 37 percent of students consume it by the eighth grade.<sup>1</sup>

One in twelve people who begin drinking alcohol wind up addicted to it, their lives forever marked by strong drink. The Bible has a word for these folks: unwise.

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler,"

1 <http://sadd.org/stats.htm>

Proverbs 20:1 says, "and whoever is led astray by it is not wise."

In Proverbs 23:29-35, we read this sobering litany:

*29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?*

*30 Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine.*

*31 Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly.*

*32 In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.*

*33 Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things.*

*34 You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast.*

*35 "They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink."*

The writer of this proverb, Solomon, isn't exactly beating around the bush here. Forthrightly and forcefully, he offers us a picture of what happens when alcohol leads us astray. And it always does. It leads us astray from the wisdom we so desperately need in this life. And if drinking alcohol leads us away from wisdom, then it is wisdom that will lead us away from drinking.

Frequently, when I engage someone in conversation about alcohol, and my position of abstinence begins to surface, I am greeted with a common response. "Yeah, but didn't Jesus turn water into wine?" they offer, suggesting that Jesus' first miracle, which occurred at a wedding party during which the guests had to run out of wine, was an outright endorsement of imbibing whenever we please.

I always caution them about jumping to conclusions here by asking them, "Yes, but what kind of wine was it?"

Was it fermented or unfermented? The Greek word used in the Bible during that miracle is *oinos*, which could either mean something akin to grape juice, or else it could mean "strong drink." Personally, I struggle to believe that Jesus Christ would be in the liquor business. I struggle to believe He would serve up something to those wedding guests that would impair their faculties and possibly cause them harm. We are told throughout Scripture to always pursue wisdom, and to never be led astray. I believe Jesus encouraged these behaviors, even at the wedding that day.

Certainly, there are legitimate uses for alcohol noted in the Bible. In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul told an ailing Timothy to ingest a portion of wine to help ease his stomach problems; the passage reads, "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." They didn't have Pepto Bismol back then; a little wine served as a laxative that could help the digestive system heal. Proverbs 31:6 refers to alcohol as a sedative or pain reliever, "Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress." In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the man who was broken and bruised and bleeding by the side of the road was greeted by a compassionate man who ministered to him by pouring oil and wine on his wounds, serving as an antiseptic solution for him.

But aside from alcohol's medicinal properties, what good does it bring to life? Let me lay out a few categories of consequence I have seen firsthand from alcohol's use.

### **Emotional Consequences**

Alcohol causes sorrow and grief, as the proverb we looked at earlier says. It causes conflict and contention, aggressiveness and anger and corruption of every kind. It causes red eyes, strange sights, perverse thoughts, and more. It can lead to mental complications, as evidenced by more than 25 percent of patients in psychiatric

wards, who are there at least in part because of alcohol's evil effects.

Alcohol can lead to depression, anxiety, self-destruction, self-loathing, and a whole host of emotional issues that short-circuit otherwise healthy lives.

### **Physical Consequences**

Alcohol exacts a tremendous physical price as well. The consumption of alcohol has created the largest health problem in the United States when measured in terms of morbidity, and it remains the fourth largest cause of death, after heart disease, cancer, and stroke. Alcohol reduces life expectancy by a full ten years; it is the blame for half of all homicides, half of all fires, half of all drowning incidents, and a third of all suicides. Ninety-three percent of all hit-and-run accidents, 80 percent of all crime, 50 percent of all traffic fatalities, and 50 percent of all airplane crashes are linked directly to alcohol use just before the time of the tragedy.

It taste great and is less filling, advertisers clamor for us to believe. "Taste hate; more killing" would be a more accurate slogan, perhaps.

I saw what alcohol consumption did to my dad and made a pledge as a young kid never to touch the stuff. As a pastor for nearly 40 years, I can tell you that the negative effects of alcohol on the family unit surpass *every other ill*. People drink to have a "good time," but abundance is never found in a glass. There is *no* substitute for the life-giving joy found in Christ, and Christ alone.

### **Spiritual Consequences**

Spiritually, there are dire consequences as well. As parents, we will either teach our children not to drink by our mere words or by the strength of our actions. We think we can teach them to "drink responsibly," to drink moderately and not fall into addiction or pain, but even moderate habitual drinkers are killing brain cells every day.

We look at that one-in-twelve statistic I presented earlier, thinking, "I'll never be the 'one' who gets addicted," but what if your (social,

moderate, under-control) drinking leads to drinking by someone you love, who *does* wind up addicted? "It's not good to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble," Romans 14:21 says (emphasis added). For me, it's just not worth the risk.

I teach total abstinence, because I've seen the horror show alcohol makes of a person's testimony, of his legacy, of his life. Eighty-two percent of teens will drink if their parents drink, but seventy-two percent will say "no" if their parents abstain. I'm asking you to make the loving choice for your family, for your friends, for your church, for those who don't yet know Jesus Christ. This isn't about hamstringing you with a bunch of legalistic rules and restrictions; it's about following biblical principles that help us *succeed*, not fail.

Whether we eat or drink, 1 Corinthians 10:31 encourages, we are to do *all things* to the glory of God. And I guess my question for you is this: can you honestly say that alcohol use and/or abuse will somehow glorify God?

I've had to ask the same question of myself along the way. And my answer always is no. Think about it: what if I were to say, "Hey, I'm going to start drinking, but I'm the guy who can handle his liquor. I promise, I won't get drunk. Sure, you're going to see me bellied up to a bar now and then, but trust me, it's no big deal." How would you feel about placing your impressionable teenagers in my care? How would you feel about your friends living far from God getting their example of Christian commitment and faith from me?

I look into the eyes of countless young men and women in our church week in and week out and come away resolved in my stance that alcohol will not touch my lips. I think of them saying, "Well, if Jack Graham can handle it, then so can I," and I absolutely cringe. I hope I never fall into such self-centeredness to treat flippantly what is devouring millions day by day.

You can tell me to mind my own business on this subject, but I'll tell you that if you consume a drink and that minimal amount of alcohol delays

your reflexes by two seconds, causing you to careen into the car carrying one of my children or grandchildren, it most certainly becomes my business then. Please choose carefully how you will live. And I will do the same.

Yes, alcohol is dangerous. Yes, it is destructive. Yes, it is addictive. Yes, it is mean. But Jesus stands ready to heal us of all its ills. Most people I share this news with stare at me with eyes that say, "I want to stop drinking, but I'm not sure I'm ready to give up what I'll have to give up." They are still living under the illusion that alcohol is filling a void in their lives that only Jesus himself can fill. I remind them of two verses that tell us otherwise: Proverbs 10:22 says that "The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds **no sorrow** with it" (emphasis added), which means that when we walk in God's ways, though circumstances may disappoint us or threaten to destroy us, our hearts always can be at peace.

Then, in Psalm 84:11, we find promises that:

*"For the Lord God is a sun and shield;  
the Lord bestows favor and honor.  
No good thing does he withhold  
from those who walk uprightly."*

Which begs the question related to our subject matter: What "good thing" are you looking to wine or beer or scotch to provide? May we be reminded that all *truly* good things come from our Lord, and from His hand, alone.

Give Jesus your thoughts, every attitude, every actions, every reaction, and yes, every habit, and watch how he transforms your life to be a closer reflection of Him.