

Be Not Drunk with Wine, Part 3

Ephesians 5:18

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We're studying the book of Ephesians and having a wonderful time in doing it, and as we've come to the 5th chapter and the 18th verse in our study of the worthy walk of the believer, we have stopped for a brief digression because so many people have posed the question regarding the drinking of wine. In verse 18 we read: "And be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Now, we studied that in the context, but it raised the question.

We know we're not to be drunk, we know the Bible forbids us to be drunken, that that is a sin, that that is a part of our past life. The words of Peter come ringing back: "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do." And then he then goes on to talk about living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousings, and detestable idolatry. We know that's a part of the past life, we know that drunkenness is a forbidden thing, and we know that we are to be filled with the Spirit. But the question that arises is this: We agree that drunkenness is a sin, but what about drinking wine at all? What is to be the Christian's position in regard to drinking alcoholic beverages? And since this is such a major issue today and such a current, needed discussion, we have digressed from the text itself to discuss that very issue. Should a Christian drink or what does the Bible say about the Christian and alcoholic beverages?

Now, you'll remember that we tried to share with you last time some principles that we have to use as checkpoints in this discussion. The Bible does not say you cannot drink wine. I told you last time if it said that, I'd read the verse and go home. Doesn't say that. And so we have to get some other principles to determine whether it's right or wrong and if it is, then when it is and when it isn't and so forth. Should a Christian drink alcoholic beverages? This is a very important issue. So if the Word of God has something to say on it, then there's a wide audience of people out there who ought to be listening.

Now, we told you there would be eight principles or checkpoints that we need to pass through to arrive at an answer. We went through the first two last time. Let me remind you of them. The first question we asked is: Is it the same? In other words, is the wine today the same as the wine consumed in Bible times? And the reason we need to deal with that issue is because people will invariably say – that is, Christian people, if they drink wine or alcoholic beverages – that they drank in Bible times, and so if they did it in Bible times, Old Testament times, New Testament times, then it's certainly all right to do it today. And so the question is: Is the drinking of the Bible times the same as today? Was the product the same? Was the wine the same? We went into that in great detail last Sunday and we found that the answer was what? No. The wine consumed in Bible times was not the same 9 to 11 percent alcohol content wine that people drink today.

We shared with you that there were three kinds of wine, really. There was the gleukos, the Greek word gleukos, which had to do with the new wine, the fresh wine. The Old Testament word tirosh,

and that would be very much like grape juice. Of course, it could ferment very rapidly and so could cause drunkenness and therefore was mixed with water, and the lowest dilution would be three parts of water to one part of wine, reducing any alcohol content to a very low, negligible alcoholic percentage so that it wouldn't even be classified as an alcoholic drink and you'd have to sit there and drink and drink and drink until you were bloated to get drunk. Then there was oinos – oinos and that word's simply the word for wine in general. In its liquid form, we saw that wine was always mixed with water.

In the New Testament, the normal wine that had stood for a long time in a large container would be then mixed with water as high as 10 to 15 parts to 1, as low as 3 parts to 1, so that it would not present an alcoholic content and cause drunkenness. So you had the fresh wine, which was also mixed with water, you had the fermented wine, which was also mixed with water, and then you had that wine that we saw was a thick, boiled paste. They would take the new wine, boil it in water, evaporating all the water, killing all the bacteria – consequently, it could not ferment – storing it in wine skins, and then when they wanted to drink it, they would squeeze it out, it would come out like a thick paste honey, mix it again with water – Pliny, the Roman historian, says as much as 20 parts to 1 because it was a thick concentrate – and drink it at that point and then it would be unfermented.

So the wine of the Bible was either the unfermented, pasty grape mixed with water or it was mixed with water from a liquid base. But the straight stuff as we know it today, with a 9 to 11 percent alcohol content, would have been classified as shakar in the Old Testament, sikera in the New, which can be translated strong drink. And we showed you that both the historians, the pagans, and the Scriptures saw that as a barbarian drink. So that straight wine as we know it today, with a 9 to 11 percent alcohol content, was not consumed as the norm by the people of the Bible, to say nothing of the other liquor today that ranges from 15 percent to 50 percent alcohol, which is the content of a 100 proof. So it was different, and we have to make that statement because we don't want to base our drinking today on the Bible people drinking if it wasn't the same.

The second question we asked, the second checkpoint: Not only is it the same, but is it necessary? We pointed out that for most people in the Old Testament, it was sort of necessary to drink wine. They had little choice between water, milk from a goat or a cow, and wine. There may have been some other things that they concocted, but basically, that was pretty much it and normally it was pretty necessary to drink wine of some sorts. As I say, it was diluted for the normal course of life unless you wanted to drink strong drink just to get drunk or as a sedative for some severe illness. But in the Bible day, they had a problem with choice. They had rather limited choices. But today we don't have that problem, so we would say then, secondly: Is it necessary? The answer is what? No, it's not necessary today to drink wine. It then falls into the category of an option, it falls into the category of a preference, it falls into the category of a want. I've heard some people say, "Well, I just like the taste of it" and that's fine. That's a like or a preference or a want but not a necessity.

We are not like some cultures – and by the way, there may be some people in some cultures of the world who will listen to this tape and in their particular situation, they are very limited, they just have no choice whatsoever under a certain circumstance at some point in time, and that may be a different case. But in our society and frankly, for the most part, clear around the world, it is not a necessary thing. I would venture to say that every place I've been, in every language, in every culture, in every climate, somewhere there is Coca-Cola. And in addition to Coca-Cola, even in Arab countries out in the middle – we were out in the middle of the area of the pyramids and there were guys selling soda pop. You had to check out your soda pop to see what was swimming in it, but

nonetheless it was soda pop.

So it really isn't a necessity today. We have sophistication in terms of producing drinks and we have refrigeration and things like that to bypass fermentation and so we're not in the same category. So first question, then: Is it the same? No. Second question: Is it necessary? No. So we come to the fact, then, that it is a choice. If you choose to drink, it is because you choose to drink. It's a choice and people will say, "Well, I have liberty in Christ, I'm free, all things are lawful it says in 1 Corinthians 6:12, all things are lawful, I'm not bound, I'm not under the law, food is no more sacred, there is no more clean and the unclean food, Acts chapter 10, Romans chapter 14, so there's no need for me to fear the drinking. My liberty allows me that prerogative. So it is a choice and I may choose or not to choose."

Let me ask you the third question then: Is it the best choice? Is it the best choice? There are a lot of things that are a choice, you know, the Bible doesn't say you can't stick leaves in your mouth and light them on fire. The Bible doesn't say that. If you want to stick leaves in your mouth and light them on fire and blow smoke through your nose, you have the right to do that. That is not forbidden in the Bible. Of course, somebody said if God meant you to smoke, He'd have built you with a chimney, but that may not be true. But that is not forbidden in the Bible but that's a choice you make, and some people tell you that's not the best choice. You have a choice to drink coffee or not to drink coffee. Some people think coffee is wonderful; some people think the caffeine has a negative effect and it might not be the best choice although you have the liberty to drink coffee, burn plants in your mouth, and also to drink wine if you choose to use that liberty. So it's a matter of choice but is it the best choice? And let's deal in that category for a few minutes.

I want to show you a progression of biblical truths to help you to see the best choice, all right? Let's go back to Leviticus chapter 10. And I think you'll find this to be fascinating. Now, in God's basic economy in Israel, there was a separation among the people. There were higher standards for people with greater responsibility. I don't know if you really know that, but that's true. That can be illustrated a lot of ways. Take, for example, the sin offering. Remember that certain people had to come – well, everybody had to come and make a sin offering, but if it was the sin of a congregation, it would be a bullock. If it was a sin of a high priest, it would be a bullock. If it was the sin of a ruler, it would be a male goat. If it was a sin of only of a lay individual, it could be two turtle doves, it could be young pigeons, it could even be flour. In other words, it seems as though the higher you go, the higher the requirement for a sacrifice. The higher the theocratic rank, the more costly was the offering. And since the congregation itself was a priestly nation, they needed to have an offering that was equivalent of the high priest.

The high priest had to give the highest offering, a bullock. Under him, the rulers had to give a goat; under them, the people could give doves and things like that because the higher the rank, the more serious the responsibility and the greater the guilt. You see, that's what it says in James 3:1, stop being so many teachers for theirs is the greater condemnation. That's the reason the Lord said, "To whom much is given" – what? – "much is required." The higher the theocratic rank, the greater the responsibility and consequently, the more severe the sin. The sin bears more guilt the higher the position because when you sin in a high position, its ramifications are far-reaching, aren't they? A sin in the heart of the high priest or the ruler or the king had a tremendous response among the people, far-reaching, and so it is in terms of God's standards.

Now, God has established standards for His people, but in the Old Testament time, He called certain

people above those standards, and He said, "I'm setting a higher standard for you." And the first illustration of that is in Leviticus 10 verse 8, and God is giving the requirements for the priesthood here, and they're most interesting. He says to Aaron, who was a high priest, "Do not drink wine or strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest you die." Now, that's a pretty strong requirement, no wine or strong drink. Now you see what's happening? Whereas the people drank wine, which was mixed with water, or the paste that came out of the wineskin, where the people would drink this and some profligate people who would even drink strong drink, the priests were called to a higher level, you see? "You are not to do this when you enter into the tabernacle of the congregation or you'll die and this shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may put difference between holy and unholy, between unclean and clean." In other words, "You are called apart to a separation, to a consecration, to a higher level of devotion, to a higher level of commitment to God."

And some commentators say that it has to do only with when they ministered in the tabernacle, only when they ministered to the Lord, and some say it has to do with their whole life long. Well, either way the point is when they did minister for the Lord, when they were called to minister to God, they had to be total abstainers. Total abstainers. Why? Lest their judgment or their priestly functions should in any measure be clouded by taking in any alcoholic drink. God wanted their minds clean and clear and pure, and so they were forbidden to do that as if God is elevating them to another standard, another level above the people.

Proverbs 31, last chapter of the book, in verse 4 – and here you see the same standard again, not only for the priests but for the kings and the princes. Verse 4 of Proverbs 31 says: "It is not for kings, oh, Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink." Why? "Lest they drink, and forget the law and pervert the justice of any of the afflicted." In other words, not only were the priests called to an abstaining position but so were the kings and the princes. God did not want their judgment clouded. God did not want their thinking fuzzy or hazy. God wanted them set apart. God wanted them consecrated. God wanted them apart and different from the people. And verse 6 says if you're going to give strong drink to somebody, strong drink should only be given to people ready to perish. In other words, anybody else drinking it was barbaric. A strong drink, which would be the straight, unmixed wine, should be given to somebody who is perishing. In other words, as a sedative for someone in pain of death.

Now, the wine which was the normal wine, mixed, should be given to those of heavy hearts. Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more. Let the warmth and the joy that comes from the wine be for those who have deep problems, or let the strong drink for those who are dying, but for kings and for princes and for priests, if we can add Leviticus to that thought, they are to be total abstainers. So there was a level of consecration in the leadership that demanded a higher standard.

Now, let's look at Numbers chapter 6 and I'll show you that not only the kings and the princes and the priests and the high priests but there were certain people in the congregation of Israel who chose this standard, too. Anybody could choose to step up to this standard – this was the highest standard. And you'll remember in Numbers chapter 6 verse 1, the Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to the children of Israel and say unto them, when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate themselves unto the Lord."

Now, stop there for a minute. Anybody in the congregation of Israel could say, "I want to consecrate

my whole life to God, I want to devote my whole life to the Lord, I want to set myself apart unto God, I want to say no to the things of this life and yes to the things of God, I want to be different, I want to be consecrated." So God said, "I hereby institute the highest act of consecration. And it is called a Nazirite vow and it comes from the word "nazir" and "nazir" means the consecrated one. A Nazirite is a consecrated one. So when a Jew wanted to come apart and really commit himself, well that's the Nazirite vow. The Nazirite would take a vow of separation. The end of verse 2 says it: "To separate themselves unto the Lord." A vow of holiness, a vow of consecration to come apart.

And what would be the character of it? Verse 3: "He shall separate himself then from wine and strong drink, shall drink no wine of vinegar or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes nor eat moist grapes or dried. And all the days of his separation shall eat nothing made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. And all the days of the vow of his separation, there shall no razor come upon his head." So there was the Nazirite vow. You don't cut your hair and you touch no wine. The highest level of consecration involved abstinence. It was as if they were stepping up to another level and identifying with the priests and the kings and the princes and those who were set apart most unto God. They could take a Nazirite vow for 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, or even for life, and there were three people in the Bible who were Nazirites for life: Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist. And it's most fascinating that not only were they Nazirites for life but in the case of the wife of Manoah, the mother of Samson, the angel came to her and said, "You're neither to drink wine nor strong drink even as the child you're bearing."

Back in Judges chapter 13 and verse 4, we read the statement regarding the mother of Samson, just so you'll know where it is. "Beware, I pray thee, and drink neither wine nor strong drink and eat not any unclean thing. For lo, thou shalt conceive." Then in verse 7, the last part of verse 7, "For the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death." Now, when you come to the New Testament, you find it in Luke chapter 1 verse 15. Most interesting. Zacharias and Elizabeth are told by an angel they're going to have a son – in verse 13 – he's going to cause them great joy and gladness, many people are going to rejoice at his birth. And verse 15 of Luke 1 says, "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink but he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb."

Now, here's the greatest man that ever lived. Jesus said in Matthew 11:11, the greatest man that ever lived is John the Baptist. The greatest man that ever lived was a total abstainer all his life. You see, there's a level, there's a higher level than just the common, that God has lifted certain people to this level. The greatest man that ever lived. So here for special times, whether priests or kings or princes or great judges like Samson or great men of God like Samuel or great men of God as the prophet John the Baptist, there was another level of consecration, another level of devotion. A higher vow than was asked of the common people. And by the way, this was not simply common to those leaders. Anybody could do that, and there were many Nazirites in Israel. I don't think we realize that, but we really don't know how many there were but that there were many.

For example, in Amos chapter 2, it says in verse 11 that God says, "And I raised up of your sons for prophets and of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord." In other words, God says, "I raised up prophets and I also raised up Nazirites. I raised up some set apart. Some who took a higher vow. Some who had a greater standard or a higher standard of life among you. And, of course, he goes on to say how they had corrupted them, Amos says to the people, "But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink and you commanded the prophets, saying 'Prophesy not.'" They desecrated those Nazirites, those that God had set apart and

consecrated to Himself by total abstinence, the people of God had actually desecrated and they gave them wine. Now, it seems to me that many of these in Amos 2 that God established as Nazirites may well have been Nazirites for life, who were desecrated or really forced or enticed into disobedience by the rest of the people.

So God has established this vow of consecration, and there were many people who took it. God had established this high vow, and he raised up people to live at this level, priests and kings and rulers and special prophets and judges and special men like Samson and others that He lifted to that level, and for some strange reason, the people felt they needed to pull them down to their level. You know, it's a funny thing about people. Instead of attaining to the highest level, they want to grab the people at the highest level and yank them down to their own level. That's what happened in Israel. And Jeremiah, bless his heart, when he saw what was going on with that, God used him to speak to that issue, and he said to Judah, "You're disobedient, Judah." In chapter 35 of Jeremiah, he said, "You're disobedient."

Let me give you a contrast. In chapter 35 of Jeremiah, he says, "Do you remember the Rechabites? The Rechabites, the son of Jehonadab? Do you remember that Jehonadab said to the Rechabites, 'You will drink neither wine nor strong drink, you, your sons, your daughters, your wives, or anybody in your family forever?'" And in other words, a whole family took the vow of abstinence. A whole family stepped up to the highest level. And God says, "And when I even put bowls of wine in front of the Rechabites, they wouldn't drink it." Jeremiah 35 verses 2 to 6. "I put bowls of wine in front of them, and they wouldn't drink it." And he goes all the way through that chapter and then he finally sums up in saying, "Look at the temptations they had to drink wine and they never broke their temptation, but you – you have been disobedient to me." "You have been disobedient to me." Here was a group of people who were obedient and they were contrasted with disobedient Israel, and the point of their obedience was their total abstinence. They had taken that level and God used them as exemplary.

Now, you say, "What does that have to do with me?" Well, by implication, a lot of things. Second Corinthians 6:17, "Come out from among them and be ye" – what? – "separate. And touch not the unclean thing." Second Corinthians 7:1, "Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We're all called to the highest level; we're all elevated to make the best choices. When you come into the New Testament, beloved, I don't believe the standard changes, I really don't. I don't believe it changes. I don't think in the New Testament God lowered His standard. Listen, if a priest was to be clear-minded at all times and never give himself the possibility of being tempted, if it was true for a king, if it was true for a prince, if it was true for a judge, if it was true for a great leader like Samuel, if it was true for a prophet like John the Baptist, is it any lower a standard for those who rule in the church of Jesus Christ which He purchased with His own precious blood? Should it be any less?

Well, what I'm saying is this: There's a high standard in the Bible for those in spiritual responsibility and leadership, and that to me is the best choice. You know, if we're all priests, if we're all those who are set apart unto God as consecrated by the Holy Spirit, if we're all – Romans 12:1 – to present our body as a living sacrifice, if we all are to come as a burnt offering, offering ourselves in total consecration as an act of natural and normal worship, then it seems to me that all of us could well consider making the best and the highest choice.

So we ask, is it the same? No. Is it necessary? No. Is it the best choice? Well, perhaps not. Maybe

the best choice is to stand with those who came apart in the Old Testament and the New, and in the church today, those who lead.

Let's ask a fourth question. If we're going to drink alcoholic beverages, we ought to face the question: Is it habit-forming? Is it habit-forming? Now, this is a tough issue because a lot of things are habit-forming. You say, "I put my sock on my left foot every day before my right foot. That's habit-forming because I've been doing it so long but it doesn't hurt me." Well, implied in the idea of habit-forming is a habit that creates a negative response. This takes us to 1 Corinthians 6:12. First Corinthians 6:12, and I quoted it in part a moment ago, but this is what it says: "All things are lawful unto me." "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient."

All things are not expedient. There are things I could do, but they'll trip me up, they'll tie me down. All things are permissible but some will hinder me, some will entangle me. And one of the things that alcohol does, although we may say, "Well, I have the liberty, I have the freedom to do that," we may find that in using that freedom, it becomes an entangling thing because the end of the verse says, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under" – what? – "the power of any." Alcohol has the ability to tangle you up but more than that, it brings you under the power of some other influence. It creates a dependency, a habit that can cause an overpowering of your own choice-making and thinking processes.

And I guess I come down to this issue: I want to avoid sin, right? And I think you do, too. I really do. If I know something is a sin, I want in my heart to avoid that. But I would go a step further and say I also want to avoid those things that can potentiate sin. I feel the same way with food. Gluttony is a sin, and if I don't know how to handle food, I can get into a lot of problems. Now, I don't have much choice about eating food – I got to eat food. It's not like drinking wine, in that sense. But you know what I like to do? I like to vary my eating and sometimes abstain totally from food on a somewhat regular basis just so that I am still in control of what I eat so it isn't controlling me. And I think that's a very basic thing in the Christian life. We never want to get under the control and the power of things that are ungodly influences, that are things that can cause us to fall into sin. So I would say the safest line is to avoid sin and also to avoid that which can potentiate sinfulness.

The people at the Alcohol Institute said that alcohol is habit-forming because it has an ability to attack the brain and create that dependency, and we all know about that. We all know about that. Now, some people can do it and it doesn't become a habit, but it has that potential. It can become a habit. So we have to answer the question. Is it habit-forming? Well, yes, it can be. It can form a habit, it can create a dependency, and it can bring us under its power so that we do things and say things and think things that are not our own thoughts but are induced within us by the power and the presence of alcohol.

Let's go to a fifth question. If, then, it is habit-forming, is it also potentially destructive? If it is habit-forming or potentially habit-forming, can it become destructive? And the answer to that is yes. I have a letter right here in my hand from a dear young lady in our church, and I'm not going to take the time to read the whole letter this morning except to say that the contents of the letter – I'll give you just a little thought here, briefly. "Last Sunday during the service on Ephesians 5:18, I was compelled to share something with you. My mother, on August 15th, 1978, died in General Hospital in intensive care from a cardiac arrest and respiratory failure. She had sclerosis of the liver, high blood pressure, damaged kidneys, and from my own diagnosis, a broken heart. Needless to say, my dear mother was an alcoholic. She had been an alcoholic from her late twenties until the day she died at age 66.

“When I committed my life to Christ, naturally I had a deep concern for my mother’s salvation. I shared the gospel with her many times, and she said that God couldn’t help her because she was an awful person. I would tell her that God loves her no matter what she was or is now, but it seemed hopeless to her. When I would talk on the phone or otherwise, sometimes she would ask me to pray for her. She also read the Bible from time to time and was searching for God. Her last days were spent in a cruddy old hotel in Los Angeles where she was once beaten up and more than once robbed.

“One day she was taken to the hospital for an asthma attack, and when I called the hospital, they told me she was in a coma. She had had two cardiac arrests and a heart attack. Well, in the coma, there was no way to reach her for Jesus, so I had all my friends, including Grace Church emergency prayer group, pray that she come out of the coma. The very next day she came out of it. She had a respirator in her mouth to breathe for her and they had a machine monitoring the heart rate and some type of kidney machine on her. It was pitiful. I stayed with her and prayed most of the day and shared with her God’s love and gift of salvation. She was very restless and didn’t seem to always know that I was there.”

She goes on to describe some more of the medical factors. “I asked her if she believed Jesus Christ was her Savior and that He died for her sins and if she did to squeeze my hand and she squeezed my hand. After that, her heart rate started going down and eventually went down to 94 beats per minute and stayed within a few beats of that the whole time. She became more peaceful then, and two days later my mom’s heart stopped and she died. The alcohol and the kind of life that goes along with it and being an alcoholic is what caused her death.” She goes on.

There’s no question that we know about that. I don’t know exactly what happened in that dear lady’s heart before she died. I hope that she meant that squeeze, don’t you? But you know the evils of alcohol and you know that it is potentially destructive. But I want to look at Ephesians 5:18 and not only know it from a testimony viewpoint but know it from the text. In Ephesians 5:18, there is a little word that is very powerful. “And be not drunk with wine, in which is excess.” That is the word *asōtia*, A-S-O-T-I-A. That is a very interesting and important word, *asōtia*. Originally meant – now, get this – it originally meant to be hopelessly, incurably sick. To be hopelessly, incurably sick. Now read the verse that way. “Don’t be drunk with wine, which leads to being hopelessly, incurably sick.” Do you think God knows that drunkenness can lead to dissipation? Yes. Yes.

We could say that the literal meaning in the time Paul wrote would be this: An *asōtia* person would be one who by his manner of life destroyed himself. One who by his manner of life destroyed himself. Drunkenness leads to incurable, hopeless sickness and destruction. That’s right in the Bible. By the way, in Luke 15:13, you have this word *asōtia* used. It says a young man went to his father and he said, “Father, give me everything that I have coming to me,” and you remember that he took everything he got and he went into a far country, and it says he engaged himself in riotous living. Remember that? Riotous living. Luke 15:13 is the word *asōtia*. He debauched himself, he engaged in a life which lead to incurable, hopeless sickness, he had a life whose manner was to lead to destruction, a wild, undisciplined, debauching life. There’s no question but that this word is indicating that God is saying to us: drunkenness leads to dissipation, drunkenness leads to destruction. You study it all the way through the Bible and you find this.

Wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging, it says. In Proverbs 4:17, it says that if you drink wine,

you find violence accompanying it. You go back into the book of Genesis, and you will find where there is drunkenness, there is immorality; where there is drunkenness, there is incest. You go back into Deuteronomy 21:20: where there is drunkenness, there is gluttony; where there is drunkenness, there is rebellion; where there is drunkenness, there is disobedience to parents; where there is drunkenness, there is a dissolute life. That's where it leads. Be not drunk with wine which produces a hopeless, incurable sickness. The Bible says, people, that it can lead to destruction.

I don't know if you know this, but a fourth of all patients admitted to mental hospitals have an alcoholic problem. It just tears the mind to ribbons. And we know that physically it produces sclerosis of the liver. Obstructed liver causes ballooning. It even causes the ballooning of the veins of the esophagus, according to one medical report I read. The thinned-out veins are more prone to rupture when food is swallowed and cause a serious and fatal hemorrhage so that some people who die of this die having eaten recently.

Further, you would probably be remiss if you didn't remember that alcohol not only kills the people who drink, but it kills a lot of other innocent people who are just standing around. Do you know that in 41.2 percent of all violent deaths, alcohol is a factor? Nearly half of everybody that dies violently – nearly half – is the result of some alcohol. A study conducted in Delaware indicates that alcohol figures in half of our traffic deaths. In New York City, a joint study made by the New York State Department of Health and Cornell University revealed that 73 percent of the drivers responsible for the accidents in which they died had been drinking – 73 percent. In Westchester County, New York, blood tests were done on 83 drivers who were killed in single-vehicle accidents. The tests revealed that 79 percent of these drivers were under the influence of liquor.

Alcohol is a deadly thing. It leads to excess, asōtia, hopeless, incurable illness and the book of Proverbs just talks about this over and over and over. Isaiah chapter 28, let me read you verse 7. Says, "But they also have erred" – listen – "through wine and through strong drink are out of the way." The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink, they err in their visions, they stumble in judgment, their tables are full of vomit and filthiness so that there's no clean place.

So who's left to teach knowledge? Who's left to speak for God? It corrupted the priesthood, it corrupted the prophets. That's why, you see, God lifted everybody above that he wanted in leadership. That's why He elevated those people. Because it had the potential to lead to a slobbering, sickening, vomiting group of leaders sitting around a table. And so God lifted it. In Joel, God withdrew the right to drink. Joel 1:5: "Awake, you drunkards and weep and wail, you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine for it's cut off from your mouth." God says, "No more drink for you." Why? The locusts came in and the locusts destroyed the crops and He says, "You're never going to take another drink as long as you live."

Ephraim's iniquity in Hosea chapter 7 was linked to wine. Amos writes several places, chapter 2, chapter 4, chapter 6, about the terrible debauchery that comes from drunkenness and wine. We know that it can lead to that, and so the question comes that if it can lead to that, why would we put in front of us something that can lead to that when we don't have to? Habakkuk 2:15: "Woe unto him who gives his neighbor drink, that puts his wineskin to him and makes him drunk also that thou may look on their nakedness. Thou art filled but with shame, not glory. Drink thou also and let thy shame come upon thee. The cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto thee and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory." Boy, what a verse. You do that and God's going to spew on you. God's going

to make you drink his cup of judgment. You get your neighbor drunk, listen, and God's going to spew on you. That's serious.

You see, God knows what it results in. You've been to skid row, you've seen the poor pathetic that walk around in that area, you know what's been going on with the stabber and those defenseless people who couldn't defend themselves at all against an attack or reasonably, at least. You've seen that kind of life. I grew up, my early years, preaching in missions, mission after mission down there, and I know what that's like and so do you. You know what it leads to. I have to ask myself the question: Anything that's that potentially destructive, is it wise for me to engage myself in any entertainment of it at all?

So – is it the same, is it necessary, is it the best, is it habit-forming, is it potentially destructive? Number six – and we'll do the last three real quick. Is it offensive to other Christians? Here's another checkpoint. You got to ask yourself this: If I drink, is it going to offend other Christians? You say, "I'm free. I don't want to get into some legalistic bondage. I'm free to do what I want and I can handle it." A guy said to me last week, he said, "I can handle it, I don't know what you're so upset about. I just like one little shot of scotch in the morning and one little shot at night, and I can handle it, it has no effect on me." I say, "Well, maybe you can handle it. Maybe you can. But maybe somebody who sees you do that can't."

Now listen to this. In 1 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 9, there's a general principle, and then it becomes very specific in Romans 14, but 1 Corinthians 8:9, "Take heed," he says, "lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." You know, I've had parents come to me and say, "You know, we used to drink, and we drank until our kids became teenagers, and then we stopped drinking because we saw that they took our example and began to drink, and they couldn't handle it." You know, a lot of parents have had that happen. When the police call them up and say, "We got your kid down here. He was drunk. We found him laying in the street." You see, you may have the liberty and you may have the moderation you may have the maturity and the strength, but you may set the example for somebody who cannot handle it.

Further, in Paul's time, drunkenness was associated with pagan religion, remember that? Bacchus and Dionysus and all the things we went into last time. Drunkenness was associated with pagan religion, and when people became Christians, just like they didn't want to eat the meat that was offered to idols anymore, a lot of them didn't want a thing to do with the drinking, either. And boy, when they became Christians, one of the things they let go was drinking. They became teetotalers. And when Christians would come along and say, "We have the liberty to drink" and they would drink wine, it would be very offensive to these people who had all their lifelong in paganism associated drinking with the ceremonies of Satan.

Now go to Romans 14 and I'll show you that because that is precisely the issue to which Paul speaks. Here were some people who in Rome had been exposed to all of this evil drunkenness connected with pagan worship and now they were Christians, and some of these other Christians were – maybe they were Jewish Christians, they didn't have this background and they didn't have a problem with drinking, but boy, some of these Gentile Christians, they had associated the drunkenness and the debauchery and the immorality and the gluttony and the evil and all of the terrible dissipation that went with drunkenness and when they came to become Christians, boy, they didn't want a thing to do with it. And some Christian would come along and say, "Aw, drink up, it's no big deal," and they would be deeply offended. And they didn't think they had that freedom because to

them, that was the old life and now in the new life, it ought to be different.

And some Christians who would take their liberty to drink in front of those Christians who couldn't have that liberty because of their past, would be very offensive and they'd make that brother stumble and they'd make that brother wounded and grieved and so in Romans 14, Paul says you shouldn't do that, see. In verse 13, he says – look the end of verse 13: "Let no man put a stumbling block or occasion to fall in his brother's way." Don't do that; it'll offend him.

Further, there's another category of people. There are some people who can't handle some things. But if you do it, they'll say, "Oh, it must be all right," they'll do it and become alcoholics, you see? You not only will offend some but you'll make some stumble and become weak. So he says don't do that, don't make people stumble, either by doing something they feel is so wrong or by doing something that they think they have the right to do and then when they do it, they become alcoholics.

You know, I've met too many alcoholics. I've seen Jesus Christ change too many alcoholics. I've been to too many Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and sat in the back and watched what went on. I've been to too much of that stuff to ever want to be responsible in my life for giving anybody the idea that they can go ahead and drink what they want. Because I have no control over who's going to follow my example and end up with a disastered life. But he says here, look: "Nothing is unclean of itself" – verse 14. That's not the issue, not in and of itself. But if your brother is grieved with your food – verse 15 – "then you're not walking in love." In other words, you're saying, "Look, I don't care what you think. I'm going to drink if I like and you can hang it on your ear." Then you don't love your brother. You don't love your brother. For verse 17 says, "The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." What you want to cultivate is righteousness and peace and joy, not the liberty to drink and eat.

So – verse 19 – "Let us therefore follow the things which make for peace and the things with which one may edify another." Just do what's going to build somebody up, not what's going to tear them down. Don't do what'll make them stumble, make them weak or make them offended. "For food" – verse 20 – "destroy not the work of God." "All things, indeed, are pure but it is evil for that man who eats with offense." It might be okay to drink, nothing wrong with wine in and of itself if it's diluted properly and doesn't take away your senses, but if you do it, is it going to make somebody else offended? So verse 21 calls for total abstinence in certain situations. "It's good neither to eat meat or to drink wine." Don't drink it at all "if it causes your brother to stumble, be offended, or made weak." See? Put it away. He's talking here not about any food but about meat offered to idols, so he's saying don't eat meat offered to idols and don't drink any wine if it makes somebody offended, somebody stumble.

You say, "Boy, you could go through your whole life adjusting to other people." That's the idea. That's what God wants you to do. You know, there are people who have come out of an alcoholic background and it's one of the most wonderful things in the world, that Jesus Christ had delivered them. It's the most exciting thing that they can think of, that Christ has delivered them and saved them and washed them clean and taken away that evil sin of alcoholism and drunkenness, and for a Christian to come along and kind of exalt that liberty in front of them is very offensive, to say nothing of doing it and letting your children see it or some weaker brother and they fall into a terrible, terrible pit.

So we ask the question: Is it the same? And the answer is no. Is it necessary? And the answer is no.

Is it the best choice? The answer is no. Is it habit-forming? Yes, it can be. Is it potentially destructive? Oh, yes. Is it offensive to other Christians? Very often it is. There may be some places in the world where that's not true, but in a post-prohibitionist society like ours, Christianity has always kind of been associated with non-drinking and surely it's offensive to many people on that basis and to others who would stumble by it and be terribly offended because they see it as a part of their old life.

Let me ask you two more questions quickly. Will it harm my Christian testimony? Well, people say, "Oh, you know, if I drink, I can reach out to people. If I do what they do, they'll accept me." Will it really help your testimony or on the other hand, will it harm it? Well, in Romans 14:16, it says, "Let not your good be evil spoken of." It's very possible that you can be a good guy with a good ministry, but if you exercise your liberty to drink to the offense of other people, they're going to depreciate your testimony and your ministry and think less of you. I know this for a fact. If I got up in the pulpit and said to you, "Now, I want you to know that I drink, but I can handle it." You'd gasp, some of you. Some of you would clutch your Scofield Bible and run for the corners, you know? "John MacArthur drinks." And every time I got up to speak again, you'd remember, "He drinks. He drinks. I wonder if he's really got a clear mind." See? And that would bother a lot of you. Some of you, it wouldn't bother at all, but some of you, it would bother.

So if for no other reason, I don't want anybody to be disturbed or bothered, and I don't want my Christian testimony to be lessened in any manner at all because I do something. And so I ask myself the question: Will others think less of me as a Christian if I do that? And I know in the church circles, in Christian circles, there are many people who would think much less of me if I did that. And so I don't want to offend them. But what about the world? What about the unsaved?

Look at 1 Corinthians 10. First Corinthians 10:31. It's very interesting. First Corinthians 10:31 says whether therefore you eat or drink, whether you're eating meat offered to idols or drinking wine, or whatever you're doing, do it all to the glory of God. Now, how you going to do it to the glory of God? Verse 32: "Give no" – what? – "offense, not to a Jew or a Greek or even the church." So I don't want to do what'll offend the church. I don't want to take a liberty that's going to offend a whole gob of Christian people and make them think less of my testimony, nor do I want to offend the Jews or the Greeks. Now: "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit but the profit of many that they may be saved." They may be saved. You know what Paul is really saying here is? If you want to reach the people that aren't saved, stop drinking and stop eating food offered to idols. Let them see a difference. Did you get that? Let them see a difference. I don't seek to do what I want to do. I may have the liberty to do a certain thing but I have standards. One, to glorify God; two, to offend absolutely nobody; three, to make sure that I make a difference so that people can be saved, make a distinction.

And finally, if you've made it past the first seven checkpoints, here's number eight. Ask yourself this: Are you really sure it's right to drink? I mean are you absolutely sure? Because if you have any conviction about it at all, you ought to deal with that. Had a guy come to me last week and he says, "You know," he says, "I have beer with the boys." He says, "Is that wrong?" I said, "What do you think?" He says, "Well, I don't think it's wrong but it bothers me." I said, "Do you like being bothered?" "No, I don't like being bothered." Said, "You know how to stop being bothered?" "Yeah, don't do it." Yeah, he says, "I don't think it's wrong but it bothers me." You know something? Romans 14:23 is a helpful verse in that area, and I don't have time to go into all of the exegesis of it, but just to give you a look at it, says this, "He that doubts is condemned if he eats because he eats not of faith, for whatever is not of faith is sin."

Now, the picture is this, all right? Let's take it from the drinking side. You've got a guy here, he came out of pagan religion, boy, he says it's wrong to drink that stuff, that's all a part of the pagan cults, I'm not going to touch that stuff. But some liberated brother says, "Aw, come on, Charlie, don't hang up on that, man, we're free in Christ, so go ahead and drink." But he drinks doubting, so what happens is he's already in bondage to his legalism, he's already kind of a weaker brother, he already can't enjoy his freedom, so you force him to do something against his conscience, and all you're going to do is shove him deeper into doubt, deeper into condemnation, deeper into questioning what he has the liberty to do, and because he didn't do it believing he was free to do it, it became sin to him.

Because if you can't do something with a complete free conscience, believing with all your heart it's right, don't do it because what it'll do is push you deeper into condemnation, and I'll add another thing. When you violate your conscience, you're doing a bad thing because the more you violate your conscience, the more you sear your conscience with a hot iron, and if you keep piling up the scar tissue, when God really wants to poke you when there's a sensitive issue, you won't feel it. Conscience is the tool by which God convicts you. And if you violate conscience again and again and again and again, what's going to happen is when you need it, it won't be there.

So there are some standards to follow and you have to check yourself on these, take your way through them and ask yourself the same questions I ask myself. Is it the same? Is it necessary? Is it the best? Is it habit-forming? Is it potentially destructive? Is it offensive to other Christians? Is it harmful to my testimony? And am I certain that it is right? And can I do it totally believing in faith in God that this is right? And, beloved, all of this is simply one dimension of walking circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time for the days are evil. If you want to walk as a wise Christian, this is one way to chart your course. You've got to deal with this issue. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for our time this morning, for giving us the opportunity to discuss and to share on this most important subject. Lord, we would not be legalistic and not be unloving or would not be simply adapting a cultural situation but just dealing with Your truth and Your Word. Help us to put the pieces together and make a wise decision. In Jesus' name, amen.

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