

EXONERATING TIMOTHY

WHY 1 TIMOTHY 5:23 IS NOT A LICENSE TO
DRINK

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**“Thy word is true from the beginning:
and every one of thy righteous judgments
endureth for ever.”**

PSALM 119:160, KJV

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INTRODUCTION

“Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.”
(1 Timothy 5:23).

This little book was written because 1 Timothy 5:23 has often been used to justify what the rest of the Bible plainly condemns. The verse concerns Timothy, the young pastor of Ephesus and the son in the faith of the apostle Paul.

In many discussions about alcohol, Timothy has been made to bear a weight the passage itself does not place upon him. A brief statement from Paul, written out of pastoral concern for a sick young preacher and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has been treated by some as though it were a standing permission for Christians to drink alcohol. Instead of allowing the verse to be interpreted in its immediate setting and in light of the broader testimony of scripture, many have isolated half a verse and used it to support a practice the Bible repeatedly warns against.

The position of this book is simple: the Bible does

not permit the Christian to drink intoxicating wine or strong drink. God calls His people to sobriety, vigilance, purity, and separation from the cup that mocks, deceives, and destroys. Therefore, 1 Timothy 5:23 is not a license for recreational drinking, social drinking, moderate drinking, or even a medicinal allowance for alcoholic wine. Timothy did not drink alcoholic wine, and Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did not instruct him to do so.

This book is divided into two sections: *The Main Case* and *Appendices*. *The Main Case* presents the titular exoneration of Timothy by examining 1 Timothy 5:23 in its context and answering the common arguments built upon it. The *Appendices* provide extra reading for those who wish to consider related passages, supporting arguments, and additional scripture on the subject of alcohol.

My prayer is that this short book will help believers think biblically, handle the text honestly, and refuse to use the Bible to support drinking.

PART ONE
THE MAIN CASE

ONE THE VERSE THAT STARTED THE ARGUMENT

Open the Bible to 1 Timothy chapter 5, and you will find an older apostle writing to a young pastor. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is finishing his instructions to Timothy on how to govern the house of God. He is dealing with elders, with widows, with rebuke, with ordination. Then, almost in passing, he drops a personal note:

"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." (1 Timothy 5:23).

That is the verse. Out of those twenty-three words, the modern drinker has built their justification for drinking alcohol. He says, "See? Paul told Timothy to drink. If Paul told Timothy to drink, he is telling me to drink. I have permission from the Bible to drink my beer, wine, etc."

Let us examine that claim.

The first thing to notice is that Paul does not say, "Timothy, lay off the water and start hitting the wine because life is hard." That is not the verse. The verse

names a reason, and the reason concerns Timothy's health. Paul writes, ***"for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."***

Timothy was a sick man. The Bible tells us that he had a bad stomach and ***"often infirmities."*** Paul was writing as an old man concerned for a younger man's health, the way a father might pull a son aside and tell him to take care of himself.

Now, before we go one step further, we must settle an issue: the Bible itself makes a distinction between *wine* and *new wine*. The two are not the same. Once that distinction is in place, half the argument is finished before it begins.

Consider the apparent contradiction in this very letter. In 1 Timothy 3, the Bible lays down the qualifications for a bishop:

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous." (1 Timothy 3:2-3).¹

Notice the requirement: ***"not given to wine."*** Paul says plainly that a bishop is not to be a wine-drinker. Then, only two chapters later in the very same letter, the same apostle writes to the same young pastor, who is being trained up to be the example of bishops, and tells him to ***"use a little wine for thy stomach's sake."***

How can this be? Is the apostle Paul telling Timothy

1. Read the appendix at the end of this book titled *The Word "Much"* to read about the qualifications for a deacon in 1 Timothy 3, and the controversy of not being given to ***"much wine."***

in chapter 3 that bishops must not be given to wine, and then in chapter 5 telling him to take up wine and to drink it instead of water? Is the Bible contradicting itself in the space of two short chapters?

Now think carefully about this. If a bishop is not to be ***“given to wine,”*** why would the Holy Spirit place Timothy in the path of temptation with intoxicating wine? Why would the Holy Spirit who had just said that a bishop must be sober, vigilant, and not given to wine turn around and tell a young preacher to take up the very thing that could make him unsober, less vigilant, and disqualified from the work?

That cannot be the meaning.

The Holy Spirit was not dangling sin in front of Timothy under the name of health. Neither was the apostle Paul telling Timothy to play with the very thing he had just warned preachers against.

That would be like telling a man who must remain clean from gambling, “Go sit at the card table, but only wager a little for your nerves.” It would also be like telling a man who must guard his eyes, “Go into the filthy place, but only look a little for relief.” The problem is not merely the amount, but the thing itself. If it is the kind of wine that mocks, deceives, clouds judgment, and brings a man under appetite, then it is exactly the kind of wine a bishop is not to be given to. The Holy Spirit would not prescribe what had just been warned against two chapters earlier.

So, the answer is no. The two verses are speaking of two different things. The wine forbidden in 1 Timothy 3 is one substance, whereas the wine prescribed in 1 Timothy 5 is something else entirely. The Bible's own vocabulary requires us to make this distinction, because

the Bible itself uses the word "*wine*" in more than one sense.

"As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it; so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all." (Isaiah 65:8).

The Lord here speaks of new wine in the cluster. That is not fermented liquor in a jug. That is the juice still inside the grape, sealed in by the skin, untouched by yeast, untouched by time. The Lord says of that new wine, ***"a blessing is in it."***

Compare that with Proverbs 20:1, which describes a different sort of wine altogether: ***"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."*** (Proverbs 20:1).

One is a blessing, whereas the other is a mocker. Both are called wine in the Bible. The honest reader must determine, in every passage, which kind of wine the verse has in view.

The question, then, is not, "Does the Bible ever use the word *wine*?" Of course it does. The question is, "What kind of wine is the Bible speaking of in this passage?" That must be determined by the context, by the character of God, and by the rest of scripture.

When Timothy is told to ***"use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities,"*** Paul is not overturning what had just been written concerning the qualifications of a bishop. He is not telling a young preacher to become a social drinker. He is not telling Timothy to take up the very thing that Proverbs calls a mocker, and that he had warned bishops not to be given to. He is giving health-related instruction

to a sickly man in a day when water was often unsafe and stomach ailments were common.

Even then, notice the careful wording: **“use a little wine.”** Notice that Timothy is charged to, **“use”** it. That is the language of use and purpose, not recreation. Timothy is told that this is: **“for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities,”** not for relaxation, pleasure, appetite, sin, fellowship, or celebration.

The passage is not a permission slip for the Christian to drink alcohol. To take that verse and make it a license for alcohol is to ignore the very words of the verse.

Paul’s instruction also shows us something about Timothy’s character. Evidently, Timothy was so careful about wine that Paul had to tell him to use a little for his health. Timothy was not looking for an excuse to drink (nor did he). He was not trying to get as close to the world as possible while still calling himself separated. He was so cautious that Paul had to urge him to take something for his stomach.

That is the opposite spirit of much modern argumentation. Many people run to 1 Timothy 5:23, not because they are sickly Timothys with often infirmities, but because they want a Bible verse to justify what their flesh already desires. They do not come to the verse seeking what the Bible says on the matter; they are only looking for permission to indulge in their desires.

But the Bible never presents intoxicating drink as something spiritually helpful. The same Bible that says **“use a little wine”** also says, **“Wine is a mocker.”** The same Bible that says **“a blessing is in it”** when speaking of new wine in the cluster also says, **“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red.”**

Therefore, 1 Timothy 5:23 cannot be honestly used

to overthrow 1 Timothy 3:3. A bishop is still not to be given to wine. A preacher is still to be sober, vigilant, and of good behaviour. The man of God is still to avoid anything that clouds his judgment, weakens his testimony, or places him under the power of appetite.

So, with this distinction in place, the apparent contradiction in this epistle disappears. In 1 Timothy 3, we see that the bishop is forbidden to be given to fermented wine. In 1 Timothy 5, we see that Timothy is prescribed a small measure of a different sort of wine (that is non-alcoholic), a medicinal use of the fruit of the vine for a chronic stomach complaint.

The bishop forbidden in chapter 3 to be given to drunkenness is not, in chapter 5, suddenly being commanded to indulge in the very thing he was warned against. The Bible does not contradict itself.

The reason a book like this must be written is that Timothy has been slandered. Men have made him out to be a closet drinker. They have implied that this young pastor, hand-picked and mentored by the apostle Paul, was sneaking around with a wineskin while preaching against sin from the pulpit. They have made Paul out to be a man who would tell his own son in the faith to take up a habit the Bible condemns.

Neither charge is true. Timothy was not a drunkard, neither was Paul a corrupter of young preachers. The wine Paul named in this verse was not a justification for what men and women do in bars and booze cruises today.

TWO TIMOTHY AND WINE

Look at what is said of Timothy only a chapter earlier in this epistle.

He is commanded to ***"be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity"*** (1 Timothy 4:12). He is told in the next breath, ***"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee"*** (1 Timothy 4:16).

A young man who has been told to be an example in word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith, and purity does not keep a wine cellar. He does not have a row of bottles ready for the next celebration. The very idea is absurd.

The word ***"purity"*** in 1 Timothy 4:12 should not be passed over lightly. A young preacher was to be clean in his testimony, clean in his habits, clean in his affections, and clean in his dealings with others.

That principle reaches farther than the bottle. It reaches into every appetite of the flesh. The same Christian who should not ask, "How close can I get to drink

without being drunken?" should also not ask, "How close can I get to fornication without falling?" That is the wrong question. The Christian life is not lived by seeing how near we may walk to sin while still claiming innocence.

This is one reason, among many, that unmarried couples ought not kiss before marriage. Kissing is not a small thing. It awakens affection, stirs desire, lowers restraint, and moves two people in a direction God reserved for marriage alone. The world treats it lightly because the world treats purity lightly.

"Flee also youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22). The Bible did not say to manage them, measure them, test them, or see how much of them a person could handle. The Bible said to flee. The safest place for an unmarried couple is not the edge of temptation, but far from it. A couple that belongs to Christ should want a courtship that strengthens holiness, not one that constantly tests how much restraint they have left.

Someone will call that extreme. They say the same thing about refusing the cup. The Christian who loves holiness, however, is not looking for the nearest permission; he is looking for the cleanest path. Timothy was to be an example ***"in purity,"*** and that kind of purity does not ask how much appetite it can safely awaken. It asks how best to please the Lord.

So whether the issue is wine, lust, entertainment, conversation, or courtship, the principle is the same: do not feed what God told you to flee. Do not awaken what you are not permitted to fulfill. Do not call caution bondage when God calls us to purity.

Now, recall what is said in 1 Timothy 3 about the qualifications of bishops. A bishop must be ***"not given***

to wine.” He must be **“sober.”** He must be **“of good behaviour.”** Timothy himself was being trained to exemplify those qualifications and to teach other men to do the same. He was not living one standard while preaching another.

So when Paul says to Timothy, **“use a little wine,”** we should not immediately import intoxicating wine into the verse. The word must be understood in harmony with everything else the Bible says about sobriety and drunkenness.

Consider what Paul’s instruction would mean if the wine in view was the fresh fruit of the vine.

Fresh grape juice was not something Timothy could simply leave sitting indefinitely as a standing supply. Left to itself, the juice of the grape begins to ferment. If Timothy did not drink intoxicating wine, then he would not have had a cellar stocked with fermented drink waiting for Paul to give him permission to use it.

Paul’s instruction, then, is not permission for Timothy to begin consuming alcohol. It is an instruction to make use of the fruit of the vine for a specific physical reason.

Notice the wording carefully. Paul did not say, “Timothy, it is all right to drink alcohol in moderation.” He did not tell him to begin drinking socially. He did not give him an exception to sobriety because he was sick. He said, **“use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.”**

Timothy was being told to **“use”** a little of the fruit of the vine because of his physical infirmities. This was something he otherwise was not using. Paul had to specifically tell him to make use of it.

That point deserves to be noticed.

Timothy was not sitting at home with intoxicating wine in the cupboard, waiting for Paul finally to give him permission to open it. Neither was Paul carving out a medical exception to the Bible's warnings about strong drink.

If the wine in view was fresh wine, the passage makes perfect sense without creating a contradiction anywhere else in the Bible. Timothy could seek out the fresh fruit of the vine and use a little of it for the reason Paul gave him without surrendering his sobriety, placing himself under the influence of intoxicating drink, or violating the standard he was supposed to teach other men.

That is the point. His infirmities did not give him permission to become less sober. They gave him a reason to use something wholesome that he otherwise had apparently been avoiding.

The modern drinker often approaches the verse backwards. He begins by assuming that "*wine*" must mean intoxicating wine and then concludes that Paul permitted alcohol because Timothy was sick. Yet that interpretation creates the very difficulty it claims to solve. Paul had already required sobriety, he had already warned against being given to wine, and Timothy was already being held forth as an example of purity.

Why would we then assume that the same apostle suddenly prescribed the very kind of drink that could work against those qualifications?

The simpler reading is that Paul told Timothy to use a little of the fruit of the vine for his infirmities, not that sickness temporarily suspended the Bible's warnings about intoxicating drink.

That is a very different picture from the one modern drinkers try to paint.

They read ***"use a little wine"*** and imagine alcohol. Yet, the passage says nothing about intoxication. They imagine an exception to abstinence, yet Paul gives no such exception.

When the verse is read alongside the Bible's commands to sobriety, its warnings concerning intoxicating wine, and Timothy's own testimony, there is no reason to turn ***"use a little wine"*** into "use a little alcohol."

Those are not the same statement.

Now answer me this: would the apostle Paul tell his son in the faith to commit a sin? Would the man who wrote, ***"Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit"*** (Ephesians 5:18), turn around in a private letter and tell his protégé to start a drinking habit?

Would the apostle who said, ***"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"*** (1 Corinthians 10:31), but then whisper to Timothy, "Set that standard aside and start swigging"?

Would the man who listed ***"drunkenness"*** among the works of the flesh and warned that ***"they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"*** (Galatians 5:19-21) be the same man who set Timothy on the road to those works?

The Bible says, ***"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise"*** (Proverbs 20:1). The apostle Paul was Timothy's friend, he would not deceive him. Paul was a careful man, a praying man, a man who said, ***"I keep***

under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

A man who keeps his own body in subjection does not authorize his son in the faith to surrender his.

So we come back to the assumption that lies at the heart of the misreading of 1 Timothy 5:23. The misinterpretation is this: that Timothy heard Paul's pastoral counsel and immediately took it as a license to sin. That Timothy, the moment he read the words written by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, raced out for the strongest drink he could buy and began a private indulgence.

Why on earth would you assume *that*? That is where your own mind goes. The only reason you imagine Timothy getting drunk is because that is what you would do. You project your own appetites onto the young pastor and read the verse through the dirty lens of your own desires.

If ***"the thought of foolishness is sin"*** (Proverbs 24:9), then why would the Holy Spirit instruct Timothy to take up something that produces foolishness? Again, the Bible says, ***"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise"*** (Proverbs 20:1).

Intoxicating drink *deceives* a man and makes him dumb. So are we really to believe that God, in a pastoral letter written through Paul to his own son in the faith, was telling a young preacher to do something foolish, something that could cloud his mind, damage his testimony, and ruin his ministry?

Of course not. The Holy Spirit was not telling

Timothy to play with a mocker. He was not encouraging him to indulge in carnality. He was not placing before him something that would make him foolish.

So the man or woman who grabs this verse to defend drunkenness has already left the verse behind. They are using Timothy's stomach trouble as a cloak for their own appetite. They are taking a verse about a young preacher's infirmities and twisting it into a defense of their own desire to drink alcohol.

That is dishonest handling of the word of God.

Timothy was not being told to loosen his standards. He was not being told to take the edge off. He was being told, under instruction from the Holy Spirit, to use a little wine for a bodily affliction. That is all the text says, and that is all an honest Bible believer should make it say.

The same Bible that says ***"use a little wine"*** also says ***"be sober," "be vigilant," "not given to wine," "wine is a mocker,"*** and ***"be not drunk with wine."*** No verse should be ripped from the rest of the Bible and cherry picked just so we can indulge our appetites.

So let the verse stand where God put it. Let Timothy remain the sober young pastor Paul trained him to be, let Paul remain the careful apostle who would never counsel sin, let the Holy Spirit remain holy, and let the Christian stop reaching for 1 Timothy 5:23 every time his flesh wants permission to drink.

If your strongest defense for alcohol is a sick preacher with stomach trouble, you do not have a Bible conviction. You have an excuse, which is exactly what people look for when they have already made up their minds.

THREE THE WOE OF HABAKKUK

If a man or woman wants to know what God thinks of putting a bottle into another person's hand, let them read Habakkuk 2:15.

“Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!” (Habakkuk 2:15).

Read it again, slowly. God Himself, speaking through the prophet, pronounces a divine woe upon the man who gives his neighbor drink in order to make him drunken and expose his shame. The verse does not treat drunkenness as harmless. It connects the bottle with the removal of restraint, the uncovering of nakedness, and the bringing of shame.

Modern commentators love to soften this verse. They will say, "Well, this verse is *only* condemning the man who *deliberately* makes another person drunk in order to take advantage of him. It is not condemning your friendly social drink. It is only about a narrow and unusual sin."

Is that all it entails? Let us think about that for a moment. Is there really such a great distance between the man who pours a drink for his neighbor to look on his nakedness and the man who pours a drink for his neighbor to take the edge off?

Ask the average man at the bar why he drinks, and what will he say? He will say, "It takes the *edge* off." He will say, "It *loosens* me up." He will say, "I needed something to *relax*." He will say, "It was a long day, and I just wanted to *unwind* my mind."

My friend, the whole point of strong drink is to deaden the senses, to lower the inhibitions, and to peel back the layers of self-control that a sober man wears like clothing. The drinker uses alcohol precisely to remove the edge that God put on a man's mind for his protection.

But God never commands a man to take the edge off his mind. He commands him to gird it up. ***"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;"*** (1 Peter 1:13). That is the opposite of what strong drink does. Strong drink loosens, strong drink lowers restraint, and dulls the Christian's sharp edge. Whereas, sobriety keeps the mind sharp, ready, and governed.

Drunkenness ungirds a man. It loosens what God told him to bind up. It strips away the restraint that sober judgment keeps in place. Noah drank wine, became drunken, and was ***"uncovered within his tent"*** (Genesis 9:21). Habakkuk pronounces a woe upon the man who gives his neighbour drink and makes him drunken, ***"that thou mayest look on their naked-***

ness" (Habakkuk 2:15). The imagery here is not flattering. Strong drink does not make a man free, but instead makes him exposed.

When Jesus delivered the maniac of Gadara, the movement went in the other direction. Before his deliverance, he **"ware no clothes"** (Luke 8:27). Afterward, he was found **"sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind"** (Luke 8:35). That is what God does for a man. He does not strip away his judgment and call it liberty. Instead, he clothes him and puts him in his right mind.

So when the modern drinker says, "I just needed something to take the edge off," he may not be asking to be physically uncovered (though that is often the end result), but he is asking for the *very thing* drink is designed to do: to remove restraint, dull judgment, and loosen what sobriety holds in place.

The Christian life is a sober life. The Bible says, **"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"** (1 Peter 5:8).

The Bible says, **"Let us watch and be sober"** (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

The Bible says, **"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer"** (1 Peter 4:7).

Sober means alert, watchful, sharp. The believer is to have a clear head, a quick conscience, and a vigilant mind. The believer is to be at full mental attention, because the devil is on the prowl and the days are evil.

Yet the drinker wants to take the edge off. He wants to dull the very thing God commands him to sharpen.

He wants to lay down the weapon of sobriety just when the enemy is closest.

Now ask yourself: who is most pleased when a Christian sets aside his sober mind? The answer is in 1 Peter 5:8, ***“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”***

The adversary, the roaring lion, is pleased when you drink alcohol. The minute a believer pours a drink to dull his edge, he hands Satan an easier meal.

Habakkuk says the woe falls on the man who gives drink so that he may look on his neighbor's nakedness. The motive is exposure. The motive is to see another man brought low, stripped of dignity, laid open.

Who in this universe wants you naked and exposed? Who wants your mind empty and your defenses down? Who wants you stripped of the armor of God? It is not your friends. It is not your family. It is not your pastor.

It is the devil himself.

Every time a man hands another man a bottle, he is doing the devil's work. He may not know it. He may even mean well by it and intend a “good time.” However, the spiritual reality is that he is helping to undress his neighbor's mind so the lion can see something naked to pounce on. He is not loving his friend; he is enabling sin into his friend's life and giving the devil an opportunity.

This is also one of the simplest reasons we know the Lord Jesus did not turn water into intoxicating wine at the wedding in Cana (which is the next chapter's subject). The Lord Jesus would not violate Habakkuk 2:15. The Lord Jesus, who is one with the Father, would

not pronounce a woe in one part of the Bible and then commit the same act in another part.

If the wine Jesus made was intoxicating, then Jesus brought a woe upon Himself by His own hand. The thought is blasphemous. The Lamb of God without spot or blemish would not give His neighbor drink that He might see their nakedness. He would not do it. He did not do it. We will come back to John 2 in the next chapter and see what He actually did do.

The same principle applies to Timothy. Paul would not violate Habakkuk 2:15 any more than the Lord Jesus would. The apostle Paul was not a corrupter of young preachers. He was not a man who would put a bottle into Timothy's hand and move him toward the dulling of his mind, the lowering of his restraint, or the weakening of his sobriety.

The Holy Spirit would not violate Habakkuk 2:15 either. The same Spirit who inspired Habakkuk is the same Spirit who inspired Paul to write to Timothy. The Holy Spirit is not divided against Himself. He does not pronounce a woe in one passage and then prescribe the same thing in another. He does not condemn the man who puts the bottle to his neighbor, then command Paul to put that bottle to Timothy.

If 1 Timothy 5:23 were commanding Timothy to use intoxicating drink, then Paul would be doing the very thing Habakkuk warns against. He would be putting drink before another man. He would be introducing a young preacher to something that dulls the mind, lowers restraint, and works against sobriety. That cannot be the meaning.

Therefore, Habakkuk helps exonerate Timothy too. Timothy was not being handed the drink of exposure.

Paul was not putting the bottle to him. The Holy Spirit was not leading him into the very thing God had already marked with a woe.

Christian, listen carefully. Every time you offer a drink to your neighbor, every time you bring a six-pack to a friend's house, every time you suggest that he meet you at the bar, you are stepping into the territory of Habakkuk's woe. You may not be aiming at your friend's physical nakedness, but you are certainly aiming at his sobriety, and that is the first step toward the same place.

The Bible is consistent. From Habakkuk to Peter to Paul, God commands His people to be sober. The man who serves drink to others is working against that command, no matter how unassuming his motive.

It is better to set the bottle down. Better to refuse to be the agent of another man's dulling. Better to be the friend who keeps his neighbor sharp than the friend who helps him sink.

Better still, give your mind wholly to Jesus Christ. The world desires its bottle, its buzz, its loosened tongue, its lowered guard, and its false courage. However, the Christian has something far better. He has a Saviour to serve, a Bible to believe, a race to run, a cross to bear, a devil to resist, sinners to warn, saints to encourage, prayers to pray, and a glorious future ahead.

Why trade a sober mind for a foolish hour? Why dull the edge God gave you? Why loosen what God told you to gird up? The enemy is too real, the work is too great, and the Lord Jesus is too worthy.

Let us be sober. Let us be vigilant. Let us keep the loins of our mind girded. Let us set the bottle down, lift up our eyes, and serve Jesus Christ with a clear head, a clean conscience, and an undivided heart.

FOUR WATER INTO WINE

Now we come to the favorite passage of every drinking Christian: John chapter 2.

It is the wedding at Cana of Galilee. The wine has run out, Mary brings the problems to Jesus, and He tells the servants to fill the waterpots with water. The water becomes wine, the governor of the feast tastes it, and marvels.

The drinker reads this and says, "There it is. Jesus made wine. End of debate. If the Lord Himself made wine at a party, then He clearly approves of drinking."

My friend, that argument is so full of holes it could be mistaken for Swiss cheese.

First, the Bible says Jesus turned water into wine. That is undeniably true. Praise the Lord for such an incredible miracle! However, the Bible does not say Jesus made alcohol. The Bible does not say Jesus made fermented liquor. The Bible does not say Jesus made strong drink. The Bible says Jesus turned water into *wine*.

The word "**wine**" in the Bible is broad. It does not always mean an alcoholic beverage. Just to repeat our

study in Chapter One briefly, in Isaiah 65:8 the Lord says, ***"As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it."*** Wine in the cluster, still on the vine, is not fermented liquor. That is the pure juice of the grape, the blood of the grape, sitting inside the skin of the fruit.

The important thing to see is this: the Bible does not use the word ***"wine"*** as narrowly as the modern drinker does. When a man today hears the word wine, he usually thinks immediately of an alcoholic beverage. But that is not how the Bible uses the word. The Bible can call the juice inside the grape ***"wine"*** before it has ever fermented.

That matters greatly. The word ***"wine"*** is the broad word. It can refer to the fruit of the vine in more than one condition. Sometimes the Bible speaks of wine that deceives, mocks, and destroys. Sometimes it speaks of ***"new wine"*** found in the cluster, with a blessing in it. Both are called wine, but they are not morally or physically the same thing.

Isaiah 65:8 is impossible to explain away. The ***"new wine"*** is ***"found in the cluster."*** It is still in the grape. It has not been pressed, aged, fermented, bottled, or served. It is not intoxicating liquor. Yet God calls it ***"new wine."*** That means a Bible believer has no right to assume that *every* appearance of the word wine must mean an alcoholic beverage.

So when John 2 says that Jesus made wine, the question is not, "Did Jesus make wine?" Of course He did. The Bible says He did. The question is, "What *kind* of wine did He make?"

Did He make the kind of wine that Proverbs says is a mocker? Did He make the kind of drink Habakkuk

connects with shame and nakedness? Did He make something that would dull men's minds, lower their restraint, and help them sin?

Perhaps, instead, did our sinless Lord Jesus Christ make the pure fruit of the vine, the good wine, the fresh wine, the kind of wine that could honestly be called a blessing? Was it not a blessing and a miracle that Jesus had turned this water into wine?

That is where the drinker's argument falls apart. He sees the word *wine* and immediately pours his own bottle into the text. He assumes the wine of John 2 must be the same thing he wants to drink. However, the Bible never gave him that assumption. The Bible itself has already warned us that there is wine that blesses and wine that mocks, wine in the cluster and wine that deceives, wine that comes from God's good creation and wine that becomes a snare to the soul.

Now, here is a question that ends a great many arguments. Where was the wine Jesus made one hour before He made it? Where was it fifteen minutes before? Where was it five minutes before?

The answer is: it did not exist. There was no such wine anywhere on the earth. Jesus made it on the spot, by a miracle, from water. The water was poured into the pots. The Lord Jesus spoke and the water became wine.

That should not be passed over too quickly. Jesus did not turn grapes into wine. He did not turn figs, dates, berries, apples, or any other fruit into wine. He did not take fruit juice that had been sitting in a vessel and speed up its fermentation. He did not take pressed grapes and age them instantly.

The substance placed into those waterpots was water.

Water does not ferment. Water does not rot into alcohol. Water does not become intoxicating by sitting in a pot. Water has no grape sugar to break down, no fruit body to decay, and no fermentation history behind it. If a man wants alcoholic wine in John 2, he has to bring it there himself, because the Bible does not put it there.

The miracle was not a fermentation miracle. It was a creation miracle. The Lord Jesus took water and made wine by His own creative power. The drinker wants to imagine alcohol was in those waterpots, but the text gives him no grapes, no press, no aging, no brewing, no fermentation, and no alcohol.

Now think about what that means. Fermentation is a process. It takes time. It requires conditions of warmth and storage. Wine that contains alcohol is wine that has been sitting and changing for weeks or months or years.

This wine, however, was less than an hour old. This wine had no fermentation history. This wine had no time to develop alcohol. This wine was, by definition, *new wine*. It was the freshest wine that had ever existed in the history of the world. The grape had nothing to do with it. The vine had nothing to do with it. The press had nothing to do with it. The Creator simply spoke, and the water transformed. Hallelujah!

Someone will say, "Yes, but Jesus could have made it already aged. He could have made it instantly fermented." Did Jesus do that though? The Bible does not say so. The Bible does not invite us to add to its words to fit our own carnal appetites.

If the drinker wants to argue that Jesus made fermented liquor, the burden is on him to find the verse that says so. The Bible just says "**wine**." The Bible does not say *alcoholic wine*. Jesus made brand new wine that

very hour! To insist that this wine was alcoholic is to add to the Bible, and the Bible forbids adding to its words (Proverbs 30:6, Revelation 22:18).

Also, the argument which I touched on in the last chapter is relevant here. The Lord Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. He is the same Lord who pronounced the woe through Habakkuk on those who give drink to their neighbors. He is not divided against Himself.

If the wine at Cana was intoxicating, then Christ pronounced a woe on Himself by His own act. He gave drink to the wedding guests. He provided more than they needed. The governor of the feast remarked that the host had kept the best wine until last. If that wine was intoxicating, then the Lord Jesus made the men at that wedding drunk.

The thought is blasphemous, and it cannot be. The Lord Jesus knew no sin. He did no sin. He committed no sin. He fulfilled all righteousness. The same Lord who said, ***"Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink,"*** through Habakkuk, did not violate His own word at Cana.

Therefore the wine He made was not the kind that brought woe. It was the kind that brought blessing. It was the kind found in the cluster. It was the pure blood of the grape, freshly created, sweet to the taste, glorifying to the Father, and harmless to every guest who tasted it.

We cannot leave John chapter 2 without acknowledging that the drinker often points to John 2:10, where the governor of the feast says, ***"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."***

Even if the typical wedding host did, in the world's way, hold back inferior wine for when the guests' palates were dulled, the whole point of the governor's remark is that this host has done the opposite. The Lord Jesus did not follow the world's pattern. The Lord Jesus brought the best last. The Lord Jesus is the One who does all things well, and when He gives, He does not give anything inferior in taste. He gives the best!

So here is what John 2 actually teaches. Jesus, by a miracle, created wine from water at a wedding in Cana. The wine was brand new, less than an hour old, made without fermentation, and made without time to age. The wine was the pure blood of the grape, the new wine the Bible celebrates, the kind that blessing is in. The wine was not intoxicating, because Jesus would not violate His own woe in Habakkuk.

John 2 is not a license for the modern drinker. John 2 is a glory to the Son of God, who produced something pure and so good for a wedding. To turn it into a defense of beer pong and wine tastings is to do violence to the text and to the Lord.

Remember also that the miracle at Cana was a sign. ***"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him"*** (John 2:11). The miracle was a manifestation. It was a public demonstration that this Man was no ordinary man.

If this sign was meant to manifest the glory of the Son of God, then the substance of the sign must reflect that glory. The Son of God did not display His glory by stocking a wedding with intoxicants. The Son of God displayed His glory by producing, in a moment, the finest fruit of the vine, fresh from His creating hand,

untouched by time, untouched by decay, untouched by the corruption that fermentation requires.

Fermentation, after all, is the breakdown of sugar into alcohol by the action of yeast. It is a process of decay. The grape is at its best when it is pure. The juice is at its best when it is fresh. The decay that produces alcohol is, in biological terms, the beginning of the spoiling of the fruit. The Lord Jesus, the Creator, the Sustainer, the One in whom is no decay, did not begin His public ministry by manufacturing a decayed product. He produced the cluster's blessing, fresh and incorruptible.

When the governor said, "***thou hast kept the good wine until now,***" he was speaking better than he knew. The Lord Jesus had brought forth the finest wine in human history. It was finer than anything any vintner had ever pressed, because it had come straight from the hand of the Son of God. It was not poisoned with the serpent.

It was full of blessing.

FIVE IT IS NOT FOR KINGS

“The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him. What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.” (Proverbs 31:1-5).¹

This is a mother's counsel to her son. King Lemuel's mother is teaching him what a king ought to be. She puts wine and strong drink at the top of the list of things

1. Some will object that the next two verses in Proverbs 31 say, **“Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish.”** That objection is common enough that it deserves its own answer.

For that reason, I have included an appendix within this book titled *“The Drink of the Perishing.”* The reader will see there that Proverbs 31:6-7 does not overthrow the warning given to kings, and that it is a very strange place for a Christian drinker to try to justify themselves.

kings should not touch. Why? Because kings have heavy responsibilities. Kings judge cases, make laws, and shepherd people. A king cannot afford to forget the law or pervert his judgment.

"Lest they drink, and forget the law." The very thing alcohol does is dull the mind to its duties. A king who has been drinking forgets what the law says, forgets what the case is, forgets what the cry of the afflicted requires. He cannot rule well, as he has surrendered the very faculty he needs in order to do his job.

But the verse does not stop at forgetting the law. It says, ***"and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted."*** Strong drink not only makes a man forget what is written; it twists his ability to apply what is written. A drunken king may by some miracle know there is a law somewhere (though he has likely forgotten it), but he cannot judge the poor man's case rightly. His sympathy is dulled and his discernment is blurred. That is what alcohol does. It does not merely empty the mind, but *also* warps the judgment.

Isaiah says the same thing: ***"Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!"*** (Isaiah 5:22-23). Notice the connection being made here: drink and bad judgment walk together. The man who boasts that he can "handle his liquor" is not praised by God. God pronounces a woe upon him. Strong drink makes men call evil good and good evil. It makes them justify the wicked and condemn the righteous.

Now think about the spiritual application. Who is most interested in making sure you forget the law of

God? The same one who whispered in the garden of Eden, **"Yea, hath God said?"** (Genesis 3:1). The devil's most ancient strategy is to push the word of God out of the mind of man. He has a thousand ways to do it: distraction, pleasure, pride, anger, worry, and, very near the top of his list, alcohol.

Alcohol is a forgetting drug. It makes a man forget his troubles. It makes a man forget his wife. It makes a man forget his children. It even makes a man forget himself. Most dangerous of all, it makes a man forget his God.

The Bible tells the believer to remember the law of his God. **"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night"** (Joshua 1:8). Alcohol pries that book out of a man's mouth and pries those laws out of his mind.

We saw in Chapter 3 of this book that the devil wants you naked (Habakkuk 2:15). He wants your inhibitions stripped, your mind exposed, your defenses down, and your judgement perverted. Now we add the second thing the devil wants: he wants you empty. He wants the word of God evicted from your mind.

Strong drink does both of those things at once. It makes you naked, and it makes you empty. It tears down the wall of sobriety, and it sweeps out the furniture of God's law. Christian, do not let the enemy strip you bare and empty you out. The Lord Jesus came to clothe you in righteousness and to fill you with His word.

Someone will say, "But, brother Shawn, Proverbs 31 is about earthly kings. I am not an earthly king, yet you're applying this to Christians. I am just an ordinary believer."

Christian, open your Bible to Revelation 1:5-6:

"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 1:5-6)

Open it to Revelation 5:10:

"And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:10)

The blood-bought child of God is a king. That is the believer's destiny. The blood-bought child of God is part of a royal family. The Bible says it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink.

Now, if that were not enough for you: ***"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:"*** (John 1:12).

The ***"him"*** in that verse is the Lord Jesus Christ. To receive Him is not to take a wafer, join a church, turn over a new leaf, or try to earn God's favor by religion. The verse explains itself: those who receive Christ are those who ***"believe on his name."*** They trust who He is and what He has done. They believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He died for their sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. When a sinner receives Christ by faith, God gives him the right and privilege to become one of the sons of God.

Is God not a King? Then what does that make His sons? They are children of the King, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. If Proverbs says wine is not for kings, and strong drink is not for princes, then the Chris-

tian ought to read that verse carefully. The world may claim the cup, but the sons of God should not.

Someone will say, "But I do not drink to drunkenness. I only drink in moderation."

A man may insist that he knows his limit. He may say that he has taken one drink for years and has never gone any farther. Very well. Even granting his claim, he has still not shown where the Bible commends that first drink. He has told us what he believes he can handle, but he has had to disregard what the Bible says on the subject to make that claim.

Proverbs does not praise the man who learns how carefully to hold intoxicating wine. It says, "**Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright**" (Proverbs 23:31).

Notice when the warning comes about wine. The Holy Spirit says to not even look upon it. The warning comes before drunkenness. It comes before the staggering, the slurred speech, the loss of judgment, and the loss of control. The warning comes while the wine is still sitting attractively in the cup.

That matters.

The warning in Proverbs comes before drunkenness ever begins. The wine is still sitting in the cup when God says, "**Look not thou upon the wine.**" God warns the man before he ever puts the cup to his lips.

That should settle something for the Christian. If God has already warned us about the wine while it is still in the cup, why are we trying to find a safe amount to drink? Why reach for the first glass at all?

You may believe that you can control one drink. Perhaps you can. Yet you cannot promise what that

drink may awaken in you. You cannot promise what example it may set before another believer. You cannot promise that the appetite you believe you control today will remain exactly where you intend to keep it tomorrow.

The safest drink is still the one never taken. A man who never begins drinking intoxicating wine will never become a drunkard.

Yet a man who begins may assure himself that he knows exactly where he will stop, but every drunkard who ever lost control began drinking *before* he lost control. Nobody begins with the intention of destroying his home, embarrassing his family, wrecking his health, clouding his judgment, or becoming enslaved to a bottle. Yet somewhere there was a first drink.

So, is there a biblical defense for drinking?

If the Bible says, ***“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise”*** (Proverbs 20:1), why reach for the mocker?

If the Bible says, ***“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red”*** (Proverbs 23:31), why argue for the right to drink what God told you not even to look upon?

If Proverbs 31 warns that wine can cause a king to ***“forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted,”*** why should the child of God deliberately introduce that influence into his own mind?

Moderation never answers those questions. It only says, “I think I can control it.”

Christianity should never become a continual search for how much of a dangerous thing we can safely tolerate. The believer ought to desire the cleanest path. When God warns that wine mocks, deceives, clouds

judgment, weakens restraint, and ***“at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder”*** (Proverbs 23:32), wisdom does not experiment with the serpent to discover how close it may safely come. Wisdom leaves the serpent alone.

That is where the moderation argument falls short. One drink may not make every person drunk, but that does not make the first drink wise. The Bible gives warning after warning about the thing in the cup before drunkenness ever takes place.

So why should the Christian reach for it at all? If God describes the end of that wine as the bite of a serpent, there is no wisdom in seeing how little of the serpent we can safely handle.

The moderation argument is not enough to overcome those warnings. Saying, “I only drink a little,” does not answer, ***“Wine is a mocker.”*** Saying, “I know my limit,” does not answer, ***“Look not thou upon the wine.”*** Saying, “I have never been drunk,” does not answer, ***“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink.”***

The question remains: why are you reaching for it?

The temptation in the garden also began by turning attention away from what God had said and toward what could supposedly be enjoyed without consequence. The serpent said, ***“Yea, hath God said?”*** (Genesis 3:1). That spirit of questioning still appeals to the flesh. “Did God *really* mean leave it alone? Surely a little will not hurt. Surely I can handle it.”

The wise Christian does not spend his life negotiating with the warning. Instead, he or she believes God and leaves the cup alone.

SIX THE SERPENT IN THE CUP

Proverbs 23 gives one of the longest and most pointed warnings in the Bible against strong drink. It deserves to be read in full and heeded slowly.

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again." (Proverbs 23:29-35).

There is enough in this passage to fill a book of its own. Look at what God lists as the harvest of strong drink. Woe. Sorrow. Contentions. Babbling. Wounds without cause. Redness of eyes. Strange women. A perverse heart. The disorientation of a man on the high seas or a man up a mast. The numbness of a beaten man who does not even feel his beating. Then, worst of all, the addiction: ***"I will seek it yet again."***

The Holy Spirit calls the end of strong drink a serpent and an adder. The first time we meet a serpent in the Bible, he is in the garden, and he is tempting the woman to set aside the word of God and to eat what God forbade. The strategy has not changed. The serpent is still in the cup, and he is still whispering the same lie: ***"Hath God said?"*** (Genesis 3:1).

Every time a man tips the cup, he is putting a serpent to his mouth. He may not feel the bite at the first sip. He may not even feel it at the second or the third. Yet, the bite is coming. The adder is patient. He will wait until the man's defenses are down, and then he will strike.

The bite of this serpent is no joke. The Bible says in this passage, ***"thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things."*** Strong drink does not produce holiness. It produces lust. It produces foul speech. It produces a heart that says what a sober heart would never say. It loosens the tongue of the foul man and ties the tongue of the saint.

This is what God says the bottle does. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit through Solomon. The modern church wants to argue that a little is fine? Chris-

tian, when the Bible sets the bottle before us and tells us what it does, this is the picture God gives. It is not clean. It is not harmless. It is not holy. It bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.

So why does anyone drink at all? Why does the natural man even reach for the cup, knowing what it does?

Because strong drink lies. It advertises the first sip and hides the final sting. It shows the man the sparkle in the cup, but not the serpent under the surface. It shows him the laughter, but not the sorrow. It shows him the loosened mood, but not the loosened morals. It shows him the temporary relief, but not the morning shame. It shows him the beginning, but God shows him the end.

That is why Proverbs says, ***“At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”*** The devil is always careful to hide ***“the last”*** from those he deceives. He did not show Eve the sweat, the thorns, the pain, the grave, and the blood that would follow her bite of the fruit. Sin always puts its beauty in the window and its bill in the back room.

Strong drink does the same thing. It makes itself pleasant to the eyes. It gives its colour in the cup. It moves itself aright. It looks alive. It looks attractive. It looks harmless. God says, ***“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red.”*** Why? Because the eye is a doorway. What a man keeps looking at, he will soon desire. What he desires, he will soon justify. What he justifies, he will soon take.

Notice that God does not merely say, “Do not be drunken.” He says, ***“Look not thou upon the wine.”*** That is a much stronger warning than modern Christianity wants to admit. God warns the man before the

cup reaches his lips. He warns him at the level of the eye, at the level of desire, at the level of fascination. The wise man does not ask, "How close can I get before the serpent bites?" He asks, "Why am I staring at a serpent?"

A man does not have to hate his family to be bitten. He does not have to plan to ruin his testimony. He does not have to intend to say perverse things, chase strange women, pick fights, babble like a fool, wake up wounded, or seek it yet again. He simply has to ignore God's warning and keep looking at the cup.

That is the deceitfulness of strong drink. It does not tell a man where it is taking him. No drunkard began by saying, "I want to destroy my home." No alcoholic child of God began by saying, "I want to damage my testimony and lose my usefulness." He began by looking. He began by justifying. He began by saying, "I can handle it." He began by saying, "It is only one time." He began by wrongly saying, "The Bible only condemns drunkenness."

But Proverbs 23 does not begin with a man lying drunk in the street. Before there is woe, before there is sorrow, before there are wounds without cause, before there is addiction, there is a look. ***"Look not thou upon the wine."***

That command is mercy. God is not trying to rob a man of joy. God is warning him about a serpent. If a father saw his child reaching toward a rattlesnake, he would not say, "Just touch it moderately." He would not say, "Make sure you do not get bitten *too* badly." He would say, "Do not touch it. Do not play with it. Get away from it."

The drunkard at the end of Proverbs 23 is a tragic

picture. He has been beaten, but he did not feel it. He has been wounded, but he does not know how. He wakes up from the stupor and says, ***“I will seek it yet again.”*** That is bondage. The thing that hurt him is the very thing he wants again. The serpent bit him, and he asks to kiss the serpent one more time.

What a contrast to the Lord Jesus Christ. Strong drink says, “I will wound you, and you will seek me yet again.” Jesus says, ***“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*** (Matthew 11:28). Strong drink gives a man false rest and leaves him with true sorrow. Jesus gives true rest and removes the sorrow of sin. Strong drink empties the man and sends him back thirsty. Jesus said, ***“Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.”*** (John 4:14).

So why drink? Why look at the cup when God tells you not to look? Why put a serpent to your mouth? Why invite woe, sorrow, contentions, babbling, wounds, lust, perverse speech, numbness, and bondage into your life? Why give your eyes to what God told you to turn from?

Christian, there is no glory in playing with a serpent. There is no wisdom in proving how close you can stand to the adder. There is no spirituality in defending the cup that God warned you not to look upon.

The world will seek its mixed wine, the fool will chase the sparkle in the cup, and the drunkard will say, ***“I will seek it yet again.”*** However, the child of God has something better to seek. Seek the Lord. Seek His word. Seek holiness. Seek a clear mind. Seek a clean heart. Seek the joy of the Holy Spirit. Seek the fellowship of Christ.

The cup offers a serpent; Christ offers living water.

The cup leaves a man wounded and thirsty; Christ makes the thirsty soul whole. So do not look upon the wine. Do not play with the adder. Do not kiss the serpent that God told you would bite.

Turn your eyes from the cup, and fix them upon Christ.

SEVEN THE CHILDREN OF THE DAY

This is one of the most important chapters in the main case of this book. If 1 Timothy 5:23 is going to be understood rightly, we must ask whether Paul would ever instruct Timothy to use something that moves a man away from sobriety. We must ask whether the Holy Spirit would ever command the church to be sober as children of the day, and then turn around and lead a young preacher toward the drink of the night.

That question matters because the Bible does not treat drunkenness as a small matter. It does not place it in the realm of light, watchfulness, holiness, or spiritual readiness. Again and again, the word of God connects the cup with darkness, forgetfulness, perverted judgment, and ruin.

“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us,

who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” (1 Thessalonians 5:5-8).

In this passage, we see a line drawn through the human race, and the line runs between the day and the night. On one side stand the children of light, while on the other side lies the children of darkness.

The believer is told clearly where he and she belongs, for the Bible says, ***“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day.”*** The lost world belongs to the other column. It sleeps in the night, and it is drunken in the night.

Notice that the Holy Spirit joins two things together in verse 7. He joins sleeping and drunkenness, and He sets both of them in the night. ***“For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.”***

The Bible did not have to mention the night at all. It could have said only that the lost are drunken. Instead the word of God told us that the drunkard does his drinking in the night, because drunkenness is a work of darkness (as we’ll soon see), and darkness is its natural home.

This chapter is written to follow that thread. The Bible ties the cup to the night, and it ties the night to ruin. Once a believer sees how often the word of God places sin in the dark, he will understand why the child of the day is called out of both the bottle and the night season altogether.

DRINKING BELONGS TO THE WORKS OF DARKNESS

The Lord Jesus Christ told us why men prefer the dark. ***“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*** (John 3:19). Men do not love the night for its beauty. They love it for its covering darkness. The thief waits for it, the adulterer waits for it, and the drunkard waits for it. Each one wants the same thing, which is an hour when he believes no eye will see him.

The whole appetite of the flesh runs toward the place where it imagines it is hidden. The night is such a place. There are no bars with bright lights blazing inside them, because the men who fill them need the darkness to hide their wretchedness from one another and from themselves.

Romans takes the same picture and turns it into a command. ***“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.”*** (Romans 13:12-13).

Read the list the Bible places under the ***“works of darkness.”*** Rioting and drunkenness stand at the head of it. The very next words are chambering and wantonness, which is to say sexual sin. The Bible sets drink and immorality side by side, and it sets both of them in the night, because the one so often opens the door to the other (as seen in our study on Habakkuk 2:15).

The believer is commanded to cast these ***“works of darkness”*** off the way a man casts off the clothes he slept in. He is in fact told to put on something else in their place, ***“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”*** (Romans 13:14).

Notice that last phrase. A man makes provision for the flesh long before he commits the act. He makes provision when he keeps the bottle in the refrigerator, and he makes provision when he lingers in the wrong place at the wrong hour.

THE YOUNG MAN IN PROVERBS 7

Proverbs 7 paints a vivid picture of the dangers that can come forth in the night.

“For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night:” (Proverbs 7:6-9).

See how the Holy Spirit piles up the words to make sure we know how dark it was? It was, ***“In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night”***

The young man in this passage was already in the wrong place, at the wrong hour, long before the woman opened her mouth and brought about ruin.

He is called ***“a young man void of understanding.”*** He is one of the simple ones. He has no spiritual

life within him to overrule his passions, so he is helpless against what the night is about to send him. He is not yet guilty of the act, yet he is walking straight toward it, near her corner, in the dark, with no business being there.

Then the night sends its messenger.

“And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)” (Proverbs 7:10-12).

She is the opposite of the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, whose price is far above rubies and whose feet keep to her own house. This woman is loud, she is stubborn, and her feet will not stay home. She is out in the streets at the very hour the young man is foolish enough to be out in them. The hunter and the prey often keep the same hours.

She does not overpower him with force. She overpowers him with flattery.

“With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.” (Proverbs 7:21-23).

The ox does not know it is going to the slaughter. The bird does not know the snare is set for its life. That is the deceit of sin, and it is the very same deceit we’ve already studied so far in this book concerning alcohol.

The wine shows the man the sparkle and hides the serpent. The harlot shows the young man the flattery and hides the slaughterhouse. Both bait the hook with pleasure and hide the death at the end of the road.

The Bible does not soften where this road ends. ***“Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.”*** (Proverbs 7:27). Many strong men have been slain by her. The young man thought he was out for a thrill in the evening air. Yet he was walking down to the chambers of death, and he did not know it.

WHY THE NIGHT IS A DANGEROUS HOUR

The night is not evil in itself. Many good things can happen after the sun goes down. Men work honest jobs at night. Parents care for children at night. Christians pray at night. The Lord Himself continued all night in prayer (Luke 6:12). The problem with the night is that it often gives temptation certain advantages.

A man is often weaker at the end of the day than at the beginning. His body is tired. His mind is worn. His patience is thinner. His emotions are easier to stir. His guard is more easily lowered. A temptation that looked foolish in the daylight can start sounding reasonable after midnight. Anger burns hotter when the mind is weary. Loneliness presses harder when the house is quiet. Affection can pull stronger when a conversation runs too late. The flesh finds many helpers in weariness, secrecy, and darkness.

This is why the Bible's warning in 1 Peter 5:8 is so serious: ***“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”***

God did not compare the devil to a harmless creature. He compared him to a lion. Most people do not realize that lions are primarily nighttime hunters, though they are certainly opportunistic and will hunt during the day when the occasion presents itself. Yet the cover of darkness gives him advantages. His prey sees less clearly and the shadows help him creep closer. The weaker, slower, straying animal is easier to take.

The devil works the same way. He is not limited to only the night, but he knows how to use the night and thrives in it. He knows how to use tiredness, secrecy, loneliness, bitterness, desire, and discouragement. He knows how to wait until the mind is dull, the body is weary, the conscience is quieted, and the believer is not watching as carefully as he should. He looks for the straggler, the careless one, the wounded one, the isolated one, the one who has wandered from safety.

That is why the command matters: ***“Be sober, be vigilant.”*** Sobriety and vigilance are not optional when a lion is walking about.

Imagine being in a zoo after dark and hearing that a lion had broken out of his enclosure. Would that be the moment to dull your senses? Would that be the hour to cloud your mind, slow your feet, blur your vision, and weaken your judgment? Would you say, “Bring me a bottle so I can relax”? No sane man would think that way. If a lion were loose in the dark, you would want every faculty awake. You would want clear eyes, quick hearing, steady nerves, sober judgment, and a ready step.

Yet the Bible says the believer has an adversary ***“as a roaring lion”*** walking about, seeking whom he may devour. The danger is not imaginary. The enemy is not

sleeping. The lion is walking. That is precisely why the Holy Spirit says, ***“Be sober, be vigilant.”***

Alcohol moves a man in the opposite direction. It does not sharpen his watch, but instead dulls it. It does not steady his judgment, but instead clouds it. To drink in a world where the devil hunts is like darkening your own lantern while the lion is loose.

What does strong drink do to a man? It makes him less sober and less vigilant. It weakens the very faculties God commands him to keep sharp. Alcohol does to the mind what darkness does to the road: it makes danger harder to see.

A Christian cannot afford to dull himself in a world where the devil hunts. He cannot afford to cloud his mind in a life full of snares. He cannot afford to take into his body the very thing that weakens watchfulness when God has commanded him to be sober and vigilant.

The world may laugh and make light of sobriety, but the lion does not. The devil is pleased with every lowered guard, every dimmed conviction, every late hour, every careless appetite, every wandering eye, and every drink that makes a man less alert than God told him to be.

The night is dangerous enough without putting darkness inside the mind. The lion is dangerous enough without making himself easier prey. The child of God should keep his eyes open, his mind clear, his heart guarded, and his lamp burning.

GUARDING THE EYE AND THE HOUR

The Bible says, ***“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.”*** (Proverbs 23:31). The warning came at the level of the eye, before the cup ever reached the lip.

Proverbs 7 works the same way. The young man is first seen by the watcher at the window, and the strange woman lies in wait to catch him with her eyes and her lips. The eye is the doorway. What a man keeps looking at, he will soon desire, and what he desires, he will soon excuse.

The remedy is the one Job chose. ***“I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?”*** (Job 31:1). Job did not negotiate with temptation, and he did not measure how long he could safely look. He shut the door at the eye.

The wise believer makes the same covenant twice over. He will not look upon the wine, and he will not look upon what the night puts in front of a wandering eye. He guards the eyes, and he guards the hours, because the two run together.

This is part of what it means to ***“put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof”*** (Romans 13:14). A man makes provision for the flesh when he gives it a place to speak, an hour to work, an image to feed upon, or a secrecy in which to grow. He does not have to commit the final act before he has already been foolish. He is foolish when he prepares the room for the flesh instead of fixing his eyes upon Jesus Christ.

That principle reaches into every part of the Chris-

tian life. It reaches into the bottle in the refrigerator. It reaches into the screen in the hand. It reaches into the street near her corner. It reaches into the conversation that should have ended an hour ago. It reaches into dating and courtship, where two people who desire to honor God must not only guard what they do, but when and where they place themselves.

Not every text needs an answer at midnight. Not every phone call needs to continue until the body is tired, the mind is soft, and the guard is down. Not every conversation is helped by being stretched into the night. Sometimes the most spiritual thing a young man or woman can do is end the conversation, put the phone down, and go to sleep.

A curfew is not legalism when it is used as a guardrail for purity. It is wisdom. It is one way of saying, "I know my flesh is not trustworthy. I know temptation is real. I know the night has ruined people stronger than I am. I will not make provision for the flesh."

The young man in Proverbs 7 was already foolish before he entered her house, because he was near the woman's corner in the black and dark night.

So guard the eye, guard the hour, and guard your heart. The Christian life is not lived by giving darkness every possible advantage and then hoping God's grace will rescue us at the last moment. It is lived by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and making no provision for the flesh.

CHILDREN OF THE DAY

Why should the believer refuse the drink of the night? Because of who he now is. He still wrestles with the

flesh, and that is why he must watch and be sober. Yet he no longer belongs to the night. He has been made a child of the day, and more than that, a king and a priest. ***“And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.”*** (Revelation 1:6).

It is beneath the dignity of a child of the King to go creeping after the world’s bottle and the world’s corner in the world’s dark.

The lost man drinks because he has no hope and is perishing.¹ He sees the world falling apart, he sees no heaven ahead, and he reaches for the cup to dull and deaden the misery of his condition.

The believer has no such need. He has eternal life, the joy of the Lord, a Saviour to serve, and a city whose builder and maker is God. The bottle only pretends to give what the Holy Spirit truly gives. That is why the Bible sets the two side by side and tells us which to choose. ***“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”*** (Ephesians 5:18).

This also sheds light on the marriage in Cana (chapter four’s subject in this book). Some will say, “Jesus turned water into wine,” as though that settles the matter in favor of intoxicating drink. But the same Lord Jesus who was present at that wedding also said, ***“I am the light of the world”*** (John 8:12). Why would the Light of the world supply the drink of the night? Why would the Holy One of God furnish a wedding feast with the very thing the Bible associates with darkness,

1. See appendix titled *“The Drink of the Perishing”* for more information on perishing.

drunkenness, forgetfulness, perverted judgment, and the works of the flesh?²

The Lord Jesus did not come into this world to help men sin more tastefully. He did not manifest forth His glory by giving His disciples, His relatives, and the wedding guests intoxicating drink that would dull their minds and move them away from sobriety.

The Bible tells us the purpose of the miracle Jesus performed at the wedding: ***“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him”*** (John 2:11). The miracle manifested His glory. It did not manifest the works of darkness. It caused His disciples to believe on Him. It did not send them down the road of drunkenness. The Light of the world does not need the cup of the night to reveal His glory.

This matters greatly when we come back to Timothy. The same Paul who wrote, ***“let us watch and be sober,”*** in 1 Thessalonians 5 is the Paul who wrote to Timothy. The same Holy Spirit who inspired 1 Thessalonians 5:8 is the Holy Spirit who inspired 1 Timothy 5:23. Would the Holy Spirit command the church to be sober as children of the day, and then turn around and lead Timothy toward the drink of the night? Would Paul tell the Thessalonians that drunkenness belongs to the night, and then tempt Timothy to take into his body that which moves a man away from watchfulness and sobriety?

That cannot be.

Paul was not contradicting himself. The Holy Spirit

2. See the appendix titled *“Drunkenness and the Fruit of the Spirit”* for more information on drunkenness as a work of the flesh.

was not contradicting Himself. The Spirit of God does not call drunkenness a thing of the night in one epistle and then prescribe the drink of the night to a young preacher in another. Whatever Timothy was instructed to use for his stomach, it was not intoxicating drink. It was not the cup that belongs to darkness. It was not the cup that dulls watchfulness. It was not the cup that Romans 13 places among the works of darkness.

Timothy was not being invited into the night. He was a child of the day.

EIGHT EXONERATING TIMOTHY

We have walked the long road. We have stopped at Habakkuk and felt the weight of his woe. We have sat at the wedding in Cana and watched the Lord Jesus make new wine from water. We have read the warning of Proverbs and weighed the standard set for kings and priests. We have watched the serpent strike at the end of Proverbs 23. We have seen that the Light of the world would not prescribe the drink of the night. We have heard the Holy Spirit speak again and again, in voice after voice, against strong drink.

Now let us return to the verse with which we began.

"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." (1 Timothy 5:23).

This is the verse the drinker hides behind. But after everything we have seen, it will not bear the weight he puts upon it.

The verse concerns Timothy's health, but it does not follow that the Holy Spirit gave him alcoholic wine. The Bible says "*wine*," and we have already seen that the

word can refer to more than one thing. There is wine that is a blessing in the cluster, and there is wine that mocks, deceives, and bites like a serpent. The question is not whether Paul used the word “*wine*,” because he did, but the question is what kind of wine the Holy Spirit had in view.

It cannot be the wine Proverbs calls a mocker. It cannot be the wine God says not to look upon. It cannot be the drink Habakkuk connects with shame and nakedness. It cannot be the thing forbidden to kings and dangerous to judgment. The Holy Spirit would not command Timothy to use what He elsewhere condemns.

Timothy was not a careless man looking for permission. He was a young preacher commanded to be an example “*in purity*” (1 Timothy 4:12). Paul was not a compromiser trying to loosen Timothy’s standards. He had already written that a bishop must be “*not given to wine*” (1 Timothy 3:3). Also, the Holy Spirit, who inspired both passages, is holy. He would not contradict Himself by warning against the mocker in one place and then prescribing it to a young preacher in another. Therefore, whatever Timothy used for his stomach, it was not intoxicating drink.

This also removes the supposed medicinal allowance. Paul was not saying, “Alcohol is forbidden, except when needed for the stomach.” The verse concerns Timothy’s infirmities, but the wine in question was not alcoholic wine. It was the fruit of the vine, used for a particular bodily need, in a way consistent with sobriety and holiness.

So I am ready to declare what this book set out to declare: Timothy did nothing wrong. He did not drink

alcoholic wine. He did not hide behind a loophole. He did not step into the path of the mocker. He continued to be sober, vigilant, blameless, and an example to the believers.

Timothy is exonerated. He never was guilty. The charge was always a slander, and it was a slander generated by men who needed a justification for their own sin and reached for the nearest convenient verse to provide it.

Paul did nothing wrong either. He did not authorize sin, recommend intoxicating drink, or contradict the warnings of scripture. He gave a pastoral word to a young man whose body was troubled, and that word must be understood in harmony with the rest of the Bible.

1 Timothy 5:23 is not a license to drink. It is not a medicinal allowance for alcohol. It is not an exception to sobriety. It is an instruction to Timothy, involving a little wine of the proper and blessed kind, for a particular bodily infirmity. To make it anything more than that is to add to the verse. To make it a defense of alcohol is to twist the verse.

The verdict is clear.

Timothy is exonerated.

A WORD TO THE LOST

If you have read this far, and you have never been born again, I want you to know that this book was written for you most of all. The question of Timothy and his wine is a small matter compared to the question of your eternal soul. You may have picked up this book because you were curious about the argument, or because someone handed it to you, or because you wanted ammunition for your side of the debate. Whatever the reason, you are here now, and I would be a poor author and a worse Christian if I let you leave without hearing the gospel.

The Bible says, ***“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:23). That is not a statement about drunkards only. That is a statement about every man, woman, and child who has ever drawn breath. You have sinned. I have sinned. The preacher in the pulpit has sinned. The missionary on the field has sinned. Sin is not merely a bad habit or a social failing. Sin is rebellion against a holy God, and the wages of that rebellion is death.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23).

That verse contains the worst news and the best news you will ever hear. The worst news is that your sin has earned you a wage, and the wage is death. Not merely the death of the body, but the second death, the lake of fire, eternal separation from God in a place of conscious torment. That is what every sinner deserves. That is what I deserve. That is what you deserve. The

holiness of God demands it, and the justice of God will enforce it.

The best news is that God did not leave you to pay that wage yourself. The second half of that verse says, ***“but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** God offers you a gift. Not a program, a set of rules, or a list of things to clean up before you are welcome. A gift, free and full, purchased at the cost of His own Son’s blood.

Here is what God did. Two thousand years ago, the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, took on human flesh, lived a perfect and sinless life, and went willingly to the cross of Calvary. There He died, not for His own sins (for He had none), but for yours. He bore in His body the punishment that your sin deserved. He was buried. Three days later, He rose from the dead, victorious over sin, death, hell, and the grave.

“That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4)

That is the gospel. That is the good news. Salvation is in what Jesus Christ has already done. Your part is to believe it and receive it.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8–9)

Grace means you did not earn it. Faith means you trust the One who did. The gift of God means He holds it out to you freely, and all you must do is take it.

Perhaps you say, “I will clean myself up first. I will put

down the bottle, straighten out my life, and then come to God.” My friend, that is backwards. You cannot clean yourself up. The Bible says, **“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”** (Isaiah 64:6). Your best efforts are filthy rags in the sight of a holy God. You do not come to Christ clean. You come to Christ dirty, and He is the One who washes you.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16).

Believing and trusting in the gospel of Christ is God’s power to save you from your sins. Again, the gospel, as 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 defines it, is that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

When you trust in what Jesus Christ did for you on the cross, the Bible tells us in Romans 1:16 that it is God’s power to save you. Praise the Lord!

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Romans 10:9).

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13).

That **“whosoever”** includes the drunkard. It includes the moderate drinker. It includes the man who has never touched a drop but has a heart full of pride and self-righteousness. It includes you, wherever you are, whatever you have done, however far you have wandered. Call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

Salvation is not in twelve steps. Salvation is not in

reformation. Salvation is not in white-knuckling your way to sobriety. Salvation is in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, where He died for your sin, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the scriptures. Trust Him, and you will not only be forgiven; you will be given a new nature that no longer craves the cup the way the old nature did.

A WORD ON DELIVERANCE

There is a great deal of talk today about alcoholism as a disease. The world calls it a chemical imbalance. The world calls it a genetic predisposition. The world calls it a sickness that can be managed but never truly conquered. The world hands the drunkard a sponsor, a slogan, and a lifetime label, and tells him he will be in recovery for the rest of his days.

The Bible takes a higher view of Christ than that. The Bible calls drunkenness a sin. The Bible calls it a work of the flesh. The Bible calls Jesus Christ the Saviour who delivers from sin. The same Saviour who can save a liar, a thief, a fornicator, or a murderer can save a drunkard. He can save him not only from the penalty of sin, but from the power of sin.

I have known men who could not stop drinking for a single day. They tried every program. They failed every program. Then they came to Jesus Christ, were born again, and found that the thirst for the bottle was gone.

Others may have to fight harder. Some may stumble. Some may need the help, prayers, patience, and accountability of godly brethren. The Christian life still has its battles. The difference is that the born-again man does not fight alone. He has the indwelling Holy Spirit. He has the word of God. He has the church of God. He has the promises of God. He has a High Priest in heaven who ***“is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”*** (Hebrews 7:25).

Do not lower the promise of God to match the weakness of the flesh. Jesus Christ is able to deliver. ***“If***

any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). If you belong to Jesus Christ, He has begun a good work in you, and He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

Do not make peace with the bottle. Do not make peace with the craving. Do not make peace with the old man. Run to Christ, and keep running to Him.

A WORD TO THE CHRISTIAN

If you are a saved man or woman, born again by the Spirit of God, this book has been a reminder. The standard of Proverbs 31:4 falls on your shoulders: strong drink is not for you.

Do not bargain with the moderation argument. Do not let the bottle into your refrigerator. Do not let the casual glass into your hand. The serpent is patient, and he is waiting for the slip.

Be sober. Be vigilant. Gird up the loins of your mind. Keep your sword sharp. Keep the word of God in your mouth and in your heart. Be the example to the believers that Timothy was commanded to be. Be the kind of father, the kind of mother, the kind of son or daughter, the kind of Christian whose testimony glorifies the Saviour and gives the lost no excuse to blaspheme.

Timothy had a ministry before him. He had scripture to study, believers to teach, a testimony to guard, and a race to finish. Above all, he had Jesus Christ. What could the bottle possibly add to such a life? Timothy was not being called into an empty life with one more pleasure taken away. He had been called into a full life in which the lesser thing had no rightful claim upon him.

There is nothing grand about holding a glass. There is nothing noble about defending a bottle. There is nothing spiritual about seeing how close you can stand to a serpent without being bitten. The grander life is the sober life. The better life is the separated life. The higher joy is to serve Jesus Christ with a clear mind, a clean conscience, and an undivided heart.

Let our declaration be: ***“As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*** (Joshua 24:15).

PART TWO

APPENDICES

DRUNKENNESS AND THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

One of the clearest passages on drunkenness in the Bible is found in Galatians 5. The Bible does not place drunkenness among the fruits of Christian liberty. It places drunkenness among the works of the flesh.

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21).

There it is clearly. Drunkenness is a work of the flesh. It is not a mark of Christian maturity. It is not evidence of spiritual liberty. It belongs in the same list as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, wrath, strife, envyings, murders, and revellings.

That should settle a great deal. The Holy Spirit did not list drunkenness among the things that help a man

walk with God. He listed it among the things that show the flesh is ruling.

The flesh always wants a softer name for its sin. It does not want to be exposed. It does not want to be judged by the word of God. It wants to be managed, excused, explained, renamed, and accommodated. Yet God does not hide the severity of drunkenness from us in this passage.

That is why the Christian should not be defending anything that God has placed in such company. Drunkenness is not standing beside prayer, holiness, faith, charity, temperance, and obedience in this passage. It is standing beside adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, hatred, wrath, strife, seditions, envyings, murders, and revellings. That is not a neighborhood where any Christian liberty ought to feel comfortable.

A man may say, "But I am not committing adultery." Perhaps not. He may say, "I have not murdered anyone." Perhaps not. However, drunkenness is *still* listed among the same works of the flesh.

That means drunkenness cannot be defended as though it were a harmless weakness. God has already told us what it is. It is flesh. It is the old nature finding an avenue through appetite, indulgence, and loss of control.

This also exposes the danger of "moderation" arguments when they are used to excuse the thing God condemns. A Christian should not ask, "How close can I get to drunkenness without being counted drunk?" That is the wrong question. The Christian man or woman should not study how near they may walk to the works of the flesh. He asks how far he can flee from them.

A man who wants to please God should not be looking for the smallest possible definition of drunken-

ness so he can stay just outside of it. He should be asking whether drink helps him crucify the flesh or whether it gives the flesh another opportunity. Does it make him more sober? Does it make him more watchful? Does it make him more prayerful? Does it make him more yielded to the Holy Spirit? Does it make him more like Christ?

The passage continues:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”
(Galatians 5:22-23).

Now the contrast here is crystal clear. Drunkenness is a work of the flesh, whereas temperance is a fruit of the Spirit. Drunkenness is loss of control, whereas temperance is godly control. Drunkenness loosens the tongue, clouds the mind, stirs the flesh, lowers the guard, and perverts judgment. Meanwhile temperance keeps a man governed, sober, watchful, and ready to obey God.

The drinker reaches for liquor because he wants some influence upon him. He wants something to change his mood, calm his nerves, loosen his speech, embolden his heart, or help him forget. The Christian already has someone who should influence him: he has the Holy Spirit of God.

That is why Ephesians 5:18 says, ***“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”***

The verse sets two influences in contrast. On one side is wine, while on the other side is the Spirit. On one side is drunkenness, while on the other side is fullness. On one side is the bottle, while on the other side is the blessed Holy Spirit.

The world uses alcohol as a counterfeit comforter. It drinks to find courage, comfort, cheer, confidence, relief, boldness, fellowship, or escape. The Holy Spirit gives the believer what alcohol only pretends to give, and He gives it without sin, shame, sorrow, foolishness, or regret.

Alcohol may give a man a momentary boldness, but the Holy Spirit gives true power to witness. Alcohol may loosen a man's tongue, but the Holy Spirit sanctifies the tongue. Alcohol may make a man forget his sorrow for a night, but the Holy Spirit gives peace that passes understanding. Alcohol may offer a false gladness, but the Holy Spirit gives joy unspeakable and full of glory.

A Christian who reaches for the bottle to get what he should be seeking from God is making a sad confession. He is saying that the Lord is not enough to comfort him. He is saying that the Spirit is not enough to gladden him. He is saying that prayer is not enough, scripture is not enough, fellowship with Christ is not enough, and the grace of God is not enough.

That is a serious matter.

The Bible says, ***“Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh”*** (Galatians 5:16). It does not say to walk in the Spirit and make room for the bottle. It does not say to walk in the Spirit and keep a little flesh on reserve. It says that the Spirit and the flesh are contrary the one to the other.

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other” (Galatians 5:17).

Drunkenness and temperance are not friends. The bottle and the Spirit are not partners. The flesh and the Spirit are *“contrary.”* A man cannot honestly defend the

work of the flesh and then claim he is walking in the Spirit in that same matter.

This also answers the attempt to excuse drunkenness by changing its name. The world may call it a disease, but the Bible calls drunkenness a work of the flesh.

A man may have strong temptations. He may have inherited patterns. He may have appetites that were trained in him by his home, his friends, his habits, or his past sins. None of that changes what God calls drunkenness.

Drunkenness is a work of the flesh. That means the more a man feeds it, the stronger that fleshly appetite becomes. The flesh is never satisfied. It does not take one drink and say, "That is enough." It does not take one indulgence and quietly go away. The flesh is a bottomless pit. Feed it, and it hungers more. Yield to it, and it demands more. Make provision for it, and it grows stronger in the very place where it should have been crucified.

That is why alcohol is such cruel bondage. It promises relief, but creates a deeper appetite. It promises gladness, but leaves the heart emptier. It promises escape, but digs the pit deeper. The flesh never rewards the man who feeds it. It only learns to ask for more.

Yet here is the blessed hope: because drunkenness is a work of the flesh, the child of God is not helpless before it. If it were merely a disease in the way the world speaks, a man might think he is doomed to manage it forever.

But God calls it a work of the flesh, and the Bible tells the believer how to deal with the flesh.

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

The Holy Spirit of God does not leave the believer powerless under the dominion of his old appetites. The same Spirit who indwells the saved man enables him to walk above the lusts that once ruled him. The answer to the flesh is not to feed it and hope it overdoses or is satisfied (for it never can be), but the answer is to walk in the Spirit.

That is why it is actually *better* news that drunkenness is a work of the flesh. If God names it as flesh, then God has also given the remedy. The flesh can be denied. The flesh can be crucified. The flesh can be refused. The flesh no longer has to sit on the throne of a saved man's life.

The drunkard does not need to be told that his chains are permanent. He needs to be told that Jesus Christ can make him free. The Christian bound by drink does not need a softer name for his bondage. He needs the power of the Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life.

So do not despair because God calls drunkenness a work of the flesh. Rejoice that He does. If it is flesh, then the Spirit is contrary to it. If it is flesh, then it does not have to rule. If it is flesh, then the born-again child of God has a power within him greater than the appetite that once held him.

The answer to the flesh is not to rename it into a disease. The answer is to crucify it.

“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24).

God does not tell the believer to negotiate with the flesh, feed the flesh, excuse the flesh, or give the flesh a small allowance at dinner. He says the flesh is to be

crucified with the affections and lusts. The old appetites are not to be pampered. They are to be put to death.

The Christian body belongs to God. The believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit. His mind is not his own to cloud. His tongue is not his own to loosen. His judgment is not his own to dull. His body is not his own to poison. He has been bought with a price.

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”
(1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The question we should be asking is, “Does this glorify God in my body and in my spirit?” Does it help me walk in the Spirit? Does it let the Spirit produce in my life love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance? Does it make me more sober, more vigilant, more holy, more useful, more prayerful, more Christlike?

The answer is obvious.

So let the Christian choose his influence. Let him refuse the counterfeit comforter and yield to the true Comforter. Let him turn from the spirit in the bottle and be filled with the Spirit of God. Let him walk in the Spirit, crucify the flesh, and bear fruit that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE WORD “MUCH”

One of the most common objections raised in defense of drinking comes from the wording of 1 Timothy 3:8 and Titus 2:3. After seeing that a bishop must be **“not given to wine,”** some will point out that deacons and aged women are only said to be **“not given to much wine.”** From that difference in wording, they argue that the Bible must allow a lesser amount.

Here are the two verses:

"Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre." (1 Timothy 3:8).

"The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things." (Titus 2:3).

Now set those beside what is said of the bishop in the same two letters.

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre." (1 Timothy 3:2-3).

"For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre." (Titus 1:7).

We can see that the bishop is *"not given to wine,"* whereas the deacon is *"not given to much wine."* We also see that the aged women are *"not given to much wine."* The word *"much"* is added to the one and left off the other, and the pattern is the same in both letters.

So the drinker will read these verses and say something like: "If all wine were forbidden to the believer, why did the Holy Spirit qualify it with the word *much*? The bishop is told no wine at all, yet the deacon is told not to be given *to much*. Surely the word much leaves room for a little."

Before answering that argument, we should slow down and consider the word "much" itself. The word does not always function the same way in every sentence.

Sometimes "much" names a quantity. A man who has *"much goods laid up for many years"* (Luke 12:19) has a large amount of goods. A man who *"feared God with all his house, and gave much alms to the people"* (Acts 10:2) gave a great quantity of alms. In these cases, "much"

answers the question, "how many?" or "how great a quantity?"

The same word is also used comparatively. We say in everyday speech, "I like donuts as much as cake," and we are not measuring affection in cups or pounds. We are drawing a comparison. The word "much" in that sentence is not a unit of measurement, but a tool of comparison.

The Bible uses "much" comparatively as well. Hebrews 12:9 asks, "***shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?***" (Hebrews 12:9). Here, "***much***" does not name a quantity of subjection, as though the verse were measuring how much obedience is required, but instead "***much***" strengthens the comparison between earthly fathers and the heavenly Father.

That matters here, because 1 Timothy 3:8 begins with the word "***likewise.***" "***Likewise must the deacons be grave...***" (1 Timothy 3:8). Likewise to what? To the qualifications just given for the bishop. The Holy Spirit has just described the kind of man a bishop must be, and then he turns to the deacons and says, "***Likewise.***" In other words, the deacon's qualifications are being set in comparison with the bishop's qualifications.

So when the passage says the bishop must be "***not given to wine,***" and then says the deacon must be "***not given to much wine,***" the word "***much***" does not have to be read as a permission for some wine. It is marking the comparison between the two offices. The bishop has the highest public teaching and ruling office in the church, and his standard is stated in the strictest possible terms: "***not given to wine.***" The deacon is

likewise to be grave, sober in character, and free from the mastery of wine. The presence of **"much"** does not suddenly turn a qualification list into a permission slip.

The point is simple: the word **"much"** is not strong enough to carry the drinker's argument. He assumes it must mean, "A lesser amount is allowed." But the word itself does not demand that conclusion, the context does not demand that conclusion, and the rest of the Bible argues against that conclusion.

Even if a man insists that **"much"** refers strictly to quantity (and ignores the previous truths), we must recognize that just because this verse forbids **"much wine,"** it does not grant a little. Those are two different statements, and only one of them is in the Bible. To read **"not given to much"** as "therefore some is approved" is an addition to the Bible. The verse never says it. The man who finds permission in this phrase found it because he wanted it to be there and added it to the word of God.

The Bible is full of commands built on this very structure, and no honest reader treats any of the others the way the drinker treats this one. The Bible says, **"Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?"** (Ecclesiastes 7:17).

Notice carefully what the drinker does with the word **"much."** He comes to 1 Timothy 3:8 and reasons, "If the Bible says not to be given to **much** wine, then surely a little wine must be acceptable."

Very well. Let us use the same method on the previously mentioned Ecclesiastes 7:17.

The verse says, **"Be not over much wicked."** So,

does this mean that God approves of a little wickedness? Can we make this logical leap? Does the Holy Spirit merely want us to avoid becoming *excessively* sinful? Is there a safe amount of wickedness that God recommends?

Of course not.

The very suggestion is absurd. No preacher has ever stood behind a pulpit and said, "Brethren, just be careful not to become *too* wicked. A moderate amount of wickedness is perfectly acceptable to God." No Christian parent has ever taught their children, "A little wickedness is fine, just don't overdo it."

Everyone understands instinctively that the verse is not granting permission for a lesser degree of wickedness. It is warning against a destructive course of life. The word **"much"** does not create a license for the smaller amount.

Yet when the discussion turns to wine, many suddenly abandon that same reasoning. They take a phrase that warns against a vice and transform it into permission for the vice in a lesser quantity. They would never interpret wickedness that way. They would never interpret foolishness that way. They only interpret wine that way because they want the permission.

The problem is not with the Bible's wording. The problem is with the reader's desire.

The presence of the word **"much"** does not automatically create approval for a lesser amount. If it did, then Ecclesiastes 7:17 would become an endorsement from God for moderate wickedness. Since no sane Bible believer accepts that conclusion, the argument collapses under its own weight.

The Bible also says, ***"Let not sin therefore reign***

in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6:12). Does that mean a little sin is welcome in the body, just so long as it does not reign? No one reads those verses that way, and no one should.

We can clearly see that this passage gives no permission slip for liquor.

Furthermore, if the drinker's interpretation *were* correct, then the conclusion would be very strange. The bishop would be forbidden wine altogether, while the deacon would be permitted a little. The chief spiritual example of the church would be held to one standard, while those assisting him would be given liberty to practice what he could not and be able to tempt him with their wine-drinking. That is a difficult conclusion to harmonize with the repeated biblical emphasis on sobriety, vigilance, and being examples to the flock.

When the whole counsel of God is considered, the direction is always toward sobriety, vigilance, self-control, and separation from anything that clouds judgment. Therefore these verses cannot honestly be used as a license for drinking. The permission the drinker seeks is simply not found in the text.

The Bible must be allowed to speak as a whole. When the Holy Spirit warns repeatedly that wine is a mocker (Proverbs 20:1), commands us not even to look upon the wine when it is red (Proverbs 23:31), pronounces a woe upon those who give drink to others (Habakkuk 2:15), commands believers to be sober and vigilant (1 Peter 5:8), and declares that it is not for kings to drink wine (Proverbs 31:4), those passages must be allowed to inform our understanding of 1 Timothy 3:8 and Titus 2:3. We do not interpret the warnings by the

difficult passages. We interpret the difficult passages in light of the warnings.

Therefore, even if a man remains uncertain about the precise force of the phrase "***much wine,***" he still has not found a license for drinking alcohol.

Notice what the drinker must do to make his argument work. He must take a passage that never commands drinking, never recommends drinking, never praises drinking, never encourages drinking, and turn it into a defense of drinking. The entire argument rests, not on what the verse says, but on what he assumes the verse allows.

That is a weak foundation on which to build a doctrine. The Holy Spirit could have plainly said that deacons may drink wine in moderation if that were His intention. Instead, the verse contains a warning, not an endorsement; a restriction, not a recommendation; a qualification, not a permission.

The approval the drinker seeks is not found in the words of God, but in their assumptions about them.

THE DRINK OF THE PERISHING

Whenever Proverbs 31 is used to show that wine and strong drink are not for kings, someone will almost always point to the next two verses. They will say, “Yes, but the Bible *also* says to give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish.”

That objection deserves an answer, not because the verse weakens the case against alcohol, but because it is one of the strangest verses a drinker could ever claim to support their drunkenness. Proverbs 31:6-7 does not present strong drink as the companion of wisdom, holiness, liberty, joy, or Christian fellowship. It connects strong drink with perishing, heaviness, poverty, misery, and forgetting.

Here are the verses in question:

“Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.” (Proverbs 31:6-7).

This passage is often raised immediately after Proverbs 31:4-5. The Bible says, ***“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink.”*** Then, a few verses later, it says to give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish.

Does this overthrow the warning given to kings? Not at all. Instead, it confirms it.

The passage has already told us what strong drink does. It makes a man forget. It perverts judgment. It dulls the mind that ought to be clear. That is why it is not for kings, and that is why it is not for princes. The man who must remember the law, judge the afflicted, rule rightly, and keep his mind governed has no business with the cup.

So what about the man in verse six? He is not a king on the throne. He is not a prince in judgment. He is not a man being prepared for clear service and sober rule. He is ***“ready to perish.”*** He is a man at the end. He is a man of heaviness, sorrow, poverty, and misery.

That is a strange verse for the drinker to bring into the conversation. In fact, by running to this passage, the drinker is claiming a verse that associates strong drink with perishing, heaviness, misery, and forgetting. Is that *really* the verse he wants to rally behind for his drunkenness? Is that really the proof text he wants? ***“Come drink with us, ye that are ready to perish.”*** That does not sound like Christian liberty. That sounds like a warning label.

Why would any man or woman admit that he wants to be aligned with those who are ***“ready to perish”***? Why would a child of God reach for a verse about a man ready to perish in order to defend his liberty? That

is an odd place to hide. Of all the verses in the Bible to claim for your practice, why claim the one that puts strong drink in the hands of a dying, miserable, heavy-hearted man who wants to forget?

The end of alcohol is not liberty. The end of alcohol is perishing.

It makes a man's discernment perish. It makes his sobriety perish. It makes his restraint perish. It makes his testimony perish. It makes his prayer life perish. It makes his usefulness perish. It makes his tenderness toward God perish. Long before the man dies, things around him start dying.

His walk with God begins to perish. The Bible becomes dull. Prayer becomes rare. Conviction becomes easier to ignore. Fellowship with spiritual men becomes uncomfortable. Preaching that once stirred him now irritates him. The bottle does not have to drag him into the gutter in one night to ruin him, instead it only has to cool his heart by degrees.

His home life begins to perish. A wife learns to measure his mood when he walks through the door. Children learn when to be quiet. Money that should have served the family is poured into the flesh. Words are spoken that cannot be gathered back.

His judgment begins to perish. Proverbs 31:5 warns that wine can make a man ***“forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.”*** A man under the influence of alcohol does not become more righteous, more patient, more discerning, more prayerful, or more fit to lead. He becomes less governed. He becomes easier to tempt. He becomes more likely to say what he should not say, look where he should not

look, go where he should not go, and do what he would have been ashamed to do sober.

His dignity begins to perish. The world laughs at the drunk as entertainment, but there is nothing funny about a man that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again for to be staggering, slurring, vomiting, raging, weeping, or sleeping off his shame. There is nothing funny about a father passed out while his children watch. There is nothing funny about a mother numbing herself while her home falls apart around her. There is nothing funny about a preacher losing his testimony, a husband losing his tenderness, or a young man losing his future to the cup with the serpent in it.

Alcohol promises a little relief, but it leads men lower. It promises a little gladness, but it leaves sorrow behind. It promises fellowship, but it breaks homes. It promises courage, but it makes cowards of men who cannot face life without it. It promises forgetfulness, but it leaves memories the drinker wishes he could forget.

That is why Proverbs 31 is no friend to the drinker. The passage does not present strong drink as the refreshment of the godly. It places it beside misery and perishing.

However, the believer is not ready to perish. He has everlasting life. He has the Spirit of God. He has the word of God. He has access to the throne of grace. He has a Comforter who does not poison his blood, cloud his mind, loosen his tongue, or stain his testimony. Why would such a man reach for the cup of those who are ready to perish?

The Lord Jesus Christ said, ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,***

but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The believer is not a man ready to perish. He is a man who has been saved *from* perishing by the Son of God.

So why would he claim the drink of the perishing? Why would a man with everlasting life reach for the cup of a dying man? Why would a Christian, who has been given hope in Christ, defend a practice by appealing to a passage about poverty, misery, and forgetfulness?

The child of God does not need strong drink to forget his misery. He has a Saviour who bore his sins, a Father who hears his prayers, a Comforter who dwells within him, and a blessed hope that cannot be taken away. Proverbs 31:6-7 does not give the Christian a license to drink. It shows that strong drink belongs to those trying to forget misery, not to those who have found eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Notice also the purpose named in the passage: ***“Let him drink, and forget.”*** That is exactly the problem. Strong drink helps a man forget. It does not strengthen the mind but instead weakens it. It does not sharpen judgment but instead dulls it. It does not prepare a man to serve God but instead helps him escape his sorrow for a moment.

The Christian has something better than that. The child of God is not told to forget his misery by dulling his mind. He is told to cast his care upon the Lord. He is told to come boldly unto the throne of grace. He is told to be filled with the Spirit. He is told to rejoice in the Lord. The comfort of God does not require a man to lay aside sobriety in order to receive it.

So Proverbs 31:6-7 does not give the believer a license to drink but instead shows why kings must not drink. It shows that strong drink belongs to the realm of

forgetting, perishing, heaviness, and misery. If a man runs to that verse to defend his glass, he has chosen a poor refuge. The passage does not say, “Give strong drink unto the Christian who wants liberty.” It says, ***“Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish.”***

WINE THAT MAKETH GLAD

Another verse commonly raised in defense of drinking is Psalm 104:15. The argument usually sounds something like this: “The Bible says wine makes glad the heart of man, so wine must be a good thing.”

No Bible believer should be afraid of this verse. Psalm 104 is a wonderful chapter about God’s goodness in creation. The Lord waters the earth. He causes the grass to grow. He feeds the beasts. He gives provision to man. The passage is not about drunkenness, taverns, social drinking, worldly fellowship, or the Christian laying aside sobriety. It is about the goodness of God in providing for His creatures.

Here is the verse in question:

“And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.” (Psalm 104:15).

There is no reason for the Bible believer to run from this verse.

Notice that Psalm 104:15 does not say that intoxi-

cating drink makes the heart of man holy. It does not say fermented liquor strengthens the Christian for service. It does not say drunkenness is joy. It only tells us that wine makes glad the heart of man. The Bible's own vocabulary allows for wine that is a blessing, wine in the cluster, wine that is the pure fruit of the vine (Isaiah 65:8). Gladness does not require intoxication.

The child of God should understand that better than anyone. David said, ***"Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased"*** (Psalm 4:7). There is a gladness that comes from the Lord Himself, and it is better than the gladness of harvest, increase, corn, wine, or any earthly provision. God can put joy in the heart without putting alcohol in the blood. Hallelujah!

That is where the argument from Psalm 104:15 breaks down. The drinker sees the word ***"glad"*** and assumes the heart needs a bottle. The Bible believer sees the word ***"glad"*** and knows the heart needs God. If a man must dull his senses to be glad, that is not Bible gladness. If a man must lay aside sobriety to enjoy himself, that is not spiritual joy. The Holy Spirit does not need fermented liquor to comfort the saint, strengthen the weary, or gladden the heart.

Psalm 104:15 is not teaching the believer to seek joy under the influence of drink. It is showing that God is good in His creation and generous in His provision. The vine is His, the grape is His, the blessing in the cluster is His, and the gladness He gives is clean. It does not mock the mind, loosen the tongue, stir the flesh, cloud the judgment, or leave shame behind.

Bread strengthens man's heart, yet bread can be abused by gluttony. Even flour itself, though good in its

proper place, is not meant to be eaten raw. It must be prepared properly before it becomes bread fit for food. Oil makes the face to shine, yet oil can be misused in pride and vanity. The fact that God made a thing does not mean every corrupted, mishandled, or abused form of that thing is approved.

God made the grape, but man makes the bottle his refuge. God gave the fruit of the vine, but man lets it ferment into a mocker and then claims Psalm 104 as though God blessed the serpent in the cup.

The Bible never contradicts itself. The same Bible that says wine can make glad the heart of man also says, ***“Wine is a mocker”*** (Proverbs 20:1). The same Bible that says there is a blessing in the new wine found in the cluster also says, ***“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red”*** (Proverbs 23:31).

The honest reader must let the Bible define its own words and make its own distinctions. The gladness of the heart is safe when it comes from the hand of God, but it becomes a snare when man seeks it through the mocker.

A DAUGHTER OF BELIAL

There was a woman in Israel named Hannah whose womb the Lord had shut. She had a rival in her own house who provoked her sore, and year by year, when the family went up to Shiloh to worship, the provocation came again. At last, she rose from the table where she could not eat and went into the house of the Lord. There she prayed in bitterness of soul.

The Bible records what happened next: ***“Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.”*** (1 Samuel 1:13).

The high priest of Israel looked upon a praying woman and thought he saw a drunkard. He rebuked her for it: ***“And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.”*** (1 Samuel 1:14).

Hannah’s answer is the verse that gives this appendix its title: ***“And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have***

drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto." (1 Samuel 1:15-16).

Notice the words carefully. Hannah says two things. First, she says, ***"I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink."*** Then she says, ***"Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial."*** She does not answer Eli by saying that she had drunk only a little. She clears her name by declaring that she had drunk neither wine nor strong drink at all.

That matters.

We see here that wine and strong drink are not treated as marks of godliness. They are connected with the shameful reputation of Belial. Hannah did not want Eli to count her among the profane, the worthless, and the wicked. So how did she answer the charge? She declared total abstinence from drinking liquor: ***"I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink."***

Consider what her denial implies. If drinking were an honorable thing among the daughters of Israel, then Hannah's defense would have been no defense whatsoever. She might have said, "I have taken only a little, my lord, and I am no daughter of Belial." Yet she did not say that. Her defense is total abstinence, and she offers it as proof of her righteousness before the high priest. Whatever men may say of the Bible's teaching on drink, this much is certain: a godly woman in Israel, accused of drunkenness before the house of God, cleared her name by saying that she had touched none of it.

Hannah understood that drunkenness was not a light matter. To be thought a drunken woman before the

house of the Lord was to be thought base, shameful, and wicked. That is why she says, ***“Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial.”*** She did not want Eli to number her among the wicked and profane.

To be called a daughter of Belial would have been a terrible thing. This was not a mild criticism or a passing insult. Hannah understood that Eli had placed her conduct among the wicked, the worthless, and the profane. He had mistaken a woman pouring out her soul before the Lord for a woman under the influence of strong drink.

We see that the Holy Spirit places Belial in direct opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ: ***“And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?”*** (2 Corinthians 6:15).

Christ and Belial stand on opposite sides. Hannah wanted there to be no question concerning where she stood. She belonged at the house of the Lord, pouring out her soul before God. She did not want to be counted among the daughters of Belial.

Reader, with whom do you want to be counted?

Do you want your habits, your appearance, your testimony, and your influence to identify you with the Lord Jesus Christ, or are you willing to bear the marks of Belial? Do you want those who watch your life to see a sober child of God, or conduct that belongs naturally among the wicked? This is not merely a question of how much a person may drink before he has crossed some invisible line. It is a question of association, testimony, holiness, and whose side his conduct appears to support.

No Christian should be comfortable standing where the distinction between Christ and Belial becomes diffi-

cult to see. A saved person does not become a child of the devil by committing a sin, yet a child of God can conduct himself in a manner that resembles the children of Belial. That should horrify him and make him consider his testimony.

Modern men may laugh at drunkenness, excuse drinking, or treat alcohol as a harmless liberty. Hannah did not view it so lightly. She understood that for the high priest to mistake her for a drunken woman was for him to count her as a daughter of Belial. She wanted no association with either the drink or the shameful name connected with it.

Hannah did not respond, "I drink, but I know my limit." She did not argue that Eli should respect her liberty. She did not defend the cup while rejecting the reputation attached to it. She answered plainly: "I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink."

Her words force a serious question upon every believer who defends alcohol: Why would you willingly take into your hand that which caused Hannah to fear being counted with Belial? Why defend what she was eager to deny? Why seek fellowship with the cup when the Bible commands separation from the character and conduct of the wicked?

Hannah's testimony was clear: she wanted neither the drink nor the name.

Modern men may laugh at drunkenness, excuse drinking, or treat alcohol as a harmless liberty. Yet we see here that Hannah did not view it so lightly. She understood that for the high priest to mistake her for a woman who drinks was for him to mistake her for a daughter of Belial. She wanted no association with either the drink or the shameful name connected with it.

No child of God should desire to bear the marks of Belial. Hannah's words should make every Christian stop and consider what his own conduct communicates. If drunkenness caused a godly woman to fear being counted among the children of Belial, why would a believer willingly embrace the very substance that produced the accusation? Why would he defend what Hannah was so eager to deny? Her testimony was clear. She wanted neither the drink nor the name.

As we've studied in the rest of this book, the Bible is very clear on the effects of alcohol. ***"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."*** (Proverbs 20:1). The Bible does not say that too much wine is a mocker, but says wine *itself* is a mocker. It does not say that strong drink taken to excess is raging, but says strong drink *itself* is raging. The nature of the thing is stated, not merely the quantity of it.

Again, the Bible says: ***"Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."*** (Proverbs 23:31-32).

At the first, the wine is red in the cup. It gives its colour. It moves itself aright. It is pleasant to the eye and attractive to the flesh. Yet ***"at the last,"*** it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Every man who ever lost his home, his testimony, his usefulness, or his dignity to the bottle began with a cup that moved itself aright. The serpent does not show the bite at the beginning. He hides the end until the hand is already in the snake basket.

Turn through the pages of the Bible and count the households that drink has ruined. Noah drank wine, became drunken, and lay uncovered in his tent. Lot drank wine and lay with his own daughters, and two enemy nations came from that wickedness. Nabal held a feast like the feast of a king and was very drunken, and within ten days the Lord smote him and he died. Belshazzar drank wine before a thousand of his lords and praised the gods of gold and silver, and that very night his kingdom was taken from him. Amnon was merry with wine when Absalom's servants rose up and slew him at the table.

Not one of those men lifted the first cup with the intention of being ruined. Not one of them began by saying, "I want to bring shame on my house." They drank because it was there, because others were drinking, because it seemed a small thing, because the flesh desired it, and because a man can always tell himself that he will stop when he chooses. Yet the Bible declares that ***"whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."*** (Proverbs 20:1).

Consider also the priesthood. When the Lord spoke to Aaron, He said: ***"Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die."*** (Leviticus 10:9).

The priest who served before God was not to come with wine or strong drink upon him. The Lord required sobriety in His service. The priest was to be clear, clean, and fit to discern between holy and unholy, and between clean and unclean.

Now hear the word of God concerning the New Testament believer: ***"But ye are a chosen genera-***

tion, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." (1 Peter 2:9).

If the priest of Israel dared not enter the tabernacle with wine upon his breath, what shall be said of a royal priesthood whose body is itself the temple of the Holy Spirit? If the old priest needed sobriety to serve in the earthly tabernacle, how much more should the blood-bought believer be sober as the temple of God?

There is something beautiful in Hannah's own choice of words: **"I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD."**

Hannah had poured something out. It just was not a drink.

She was carrying real sorrow. Her grief was real, and the Bible does not hide it. Yet Hannah knew where to take it.

The world tells the hurting man, "Pour yourself a drink." Yet Hannah poured out her soul before the Lord. The drinker seeks a few hours in which he does not have to feel his sorrow but Hannah brought the sorrow itself before God. She had a God to whom she could pour out her soul.

Friend, do you want to be identified with Christ or associated with Belial? Do you want the clean testimony of Hannah, or do you want to cling to the very thing she denied in order to clear her name?

Hannah's answer was unmistakable: **"I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink."**

What is yours?

GENERATIONAL CONSEQUENCES

Throughout this book, we have seen from the word of God that the believer is called to total abstinence from alcohol. Some readers will say in their hearts that they have heard the argument and remain unconvinced. They will say, "I am in control of my drinking. I never get drunk. I take a glass and stop. The verses you have quoted apply to drunkards. They do not apply to me."

To that reader, this appendix is written. Set aside for a moment the question of whether your drinking will harm *you*.

Consider instead a question the controlled drinker rarely asks. What about those who follow you? What about your children? What about the young man in your church who has watched you order a drink at the company dinner? What about the new convert who has seen the bottle in your refrigerator?

The Bible answers this question with two case studies, two men who would have insisted, if you had asked them, that they were in control of their drink. Both were righteous men and had walked with God in important

seasons of their lives, yet both took the cup and wrote a curse into their children that ran for generations after them.

NOAH: THE FIRST DRUNKARD RECORDED IN THE BIBLE

Noah was a preacher of righteousness. The Bible names him among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. The Lord found him just and perfect in his generations, and the Lord spared him and his family when the flood destroyed the rest of the world.

Then we read these words in Genesis 9: ***"And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without."*** (Genesis 9:20-22).

Notice what the first cup of wine in the Bible after the flood produced: it produced drunkenness. It produced nakedness. It produced exposure. It produced the sight that the youngest son ought never to have seen of his father. Noah did not plan it, nor did he announce, "I am going to ruin my testimony today."

The cup did it for him.

Then, when Noah awoke, he pronounced a curse: ***"Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren."*** (Genesis 9:25). A curse that ran into the generations after him. A curse that touched a grandson who was not even at the scene of his grandfather's drunkenness, except by way of the father whose character was exposed there.

Noah did not know, when he sat down with that first cup, that the dominoes would fall the way they fell. He did not know that a son would mock, that another grandson would be cursed, and that the line would carry the wound. He thought, no doubt, that a little wine after the labors of the ark and the rebuilding of the world was a reasonable comfort. He was a controlled man and a man of God. The cup, however, was not under his control.

LOT: THE SECOND CUP AND THE SECOND TRAGEDY

Lot was called a righteous man by the Holy Spirit. The Bible says in 2 Peter 2:7-8 that the Lord delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked. Lot had been brought out of Sodom by angels. Lot's wife perished looking back, and Lot survived the destruction with his two daughters.

Then comes Genesis 19:30-36. The daughters, fearful that they would have no children, devised a plan. ***"Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father."*** (Genesis 19:32). The plan worked. Lot drank wine, and he was drunken, and his daughters lay with him, and he knew it not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

The wine of Lot opened the door to incest. The wine of Lot brought forth Moab and Ammon, two nations that became perpetual enemies of Israel for centuries to come. The wine of Lot did not destroy Lot only. It produced two peoples whose existence was a thorn in the side of the covenant nation for the entire

length of the Old Testament. Generations of war, idolatry, and worship of Chemosh and Milcom. All of it traceable, in one of its roots, to a single drunkenness in a cave outside of Zoar.

Did Lot intend that result? Of course not. Lot was a drunken man in a cave. Lot was not laying out a five-hundred-year plan for the harassment of his own descendants. The wine did the laying out for him. The cup wrote the future Lot would never have written sober.

CAN YOU GUARANTEE THE SAME RESTRAINT IN YOUR CHILDREN?

Here is a question I would put to the “controlled” drinker. You may indeed have whatever measure of restraint you say you have. Grant the claim for the sake of argument. You hold your one glass and, against all probability, never go further than that one drink. You have done it for years, and you will do it for years more.

Can you guarantee the same restraint in your son? Can you guarantee the same restraint in your daughter? Can you guarantee the same restraint in the young man at your church who looks up to you, who sees you order a drink at the wedding reception, who concludes that this is what real Christian men do in their leisure hours?

You cannot. Nobody can.

Proverbs 23:32 says of strong drink that, at the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Suppose for a moment that you, the controlled drinker, have grabbed this serpent by the head. Suppose you have him by the neck, and he cannot bite you. You hold

him tight against all possibility, and you handle him with such practiced skill that his fangs never reach your hand.

What about the children behind you who watch you handle the serpent? What about the boys in your church, the new Christian next door, the niece who admires you? They see you grab the serpent. They conclude that snakes can be grabbed. They reach out for snakes of their own. Their grip is not so strong as yours. Their experience is not so honed. Their reflexes are not so quick. The serpent that did not bite you will bite them.

The serpent is not your only concern when you have grabbed its head. The serpent is also a witness to those who will try the same hold and lack your hand for it. You have not only your own life to account for, but also the lives of those you influence. The bite that lands on them will land, in part, because they watched you take the risk.

God forbid that we should be *ever* used by the devil to open a door in the life of another believer. Brother, sister, the question is not only whether you can control your drink, but whether you can promise that those who follow you will control theirs.

Since you cannot promise that, the better course is the safer and Biblical course. Set the glass down, pour out the bottle in the refrigerator, and be the man or the woman whose example feeds nobody's appetite for the cup.

WHAT THE STUDIES SHOW

The Bible is the final word on every subject it addresses. The word of God does not need the confirmation of any laboratory, any survey, or any peer-reviewed journal. Nevertheless, when the world's own researchers report what they have found about the human cost of strong drink, their findings line up exactly with what the Bible has said all along.

This appendix gathers a sample of the most recent and reliable research from American government agencies, peer-reviewed academic studies, and reputable polling organizations. Every figure cited here is attributed in the prose to its source. A full list of sources appears at the end of the appendix.

THE ANNUAL AMERICAN DEATH TOLL

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2024 that excessive alcohol use was responsible for an average of approximately 178,000 deaths each year in the United States during 2020 and 2021.

That number was not merely high. It represented an increase of about 29 percent compared with 2016 and 2017.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism identifies the leading causes of alcohol-attributable death as alcohol-associated liver disease, heart disease and stroke, alcohol poisoning, alcohol-related accidents such as falls and motor vehicle crashes, and certain alcohol-related cancers. The same institute reports that approximately 21 percent of suicide decedents in the United States have blood alcohol concentrations of 0.1 percent or higher at death.

Put into daily terms, the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics reports that excessive alcohol use is associated with approximately 488 American deaths every day. If a foreign enemy killed nearly five hundred Americans a day, the nation would be outraged. Because the killer is poured into a glass, advertised during ball games, sold in grocery stores, and defended as a liberty, the nation keeps drinking.

The roads tell the same story. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported 12,429 alcohol-impaired-driving fatalities in 2023. That was approximately 30 percent of all traffic deaths in the United States that year. In other words, roughly one out of every three Americans who died on the road died in a crash involving alcohol-impaired driving.

Many of those killed were not the drinkers. They were husbands and wives, children, elderly travelers, passengers, pedestrians, and law-abiding drivers in the other lane. Alcohol does not merely endanger the person who chooses it. It reaches across the center line.

THE COST TO MARRIAGES

The damage is not limited to the highway. It follows people home.

Researchers at the University at Buffalo Research Institute on Addictions, led by Dr. Kenneth Leonard, followed 634 couples from their weddings through the first nine years of marriage. The study, reported in 2013, found that couples in which only one spouse was a heavy drinker divorced at a rate of roughly 50 percent during the study period. By contrast, couples in which neither spouse was a heavy drinker, or in which both spouses were heavy drinkers, divorced at a rate of roughly 30 percent. The mismatched drinking pattern, where one spouse drank heavily and the other did not, was the strongest predictor of divorce identified in the study.

A separate study from the University of Michigan, published in 2014 in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, reached a similar conclusion. Drawing on data from more than 17,000 adults, researchers found that nearly half of those with a history of alcoholism had been divorced at some point in their lives. Among those without such a history, the corresponding rate was approximately 30 percent.

Other research has found the same general pattern. A peer-reviewed analysis published in 1999 in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol* found that, at the population level, an increase of one liter in average alcohol consumption per person was associated with an approximately 20 percent increase in the divorce rate. A 2024 review article in *Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation* summarized the literature by noting that alcohol abuse is linked with higher

divorce rates, with various studies suggesting that as many as half of American divorces involve at least one partner who abuses alcohol.

The bottle rarely ruins a marriage all at once. It does its work slowly. It loosens the tongue, hardens the heart, drains the money, feeds resentment, multiplies arguments, and teaches one spouse to live around the weakness of the other. Long before the divorce papers are filed, alcohol has often already divided the home.

THE COST TO CHILDREN

The heaviest burdens are often carried by those who had no choice in the matter.

Researchers at the University of Michigan, drawing on the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, estimate that approximately 12 million American parents meet the diagnostic criteria for some level of alcohol use disorder. A separate analysis published in *JAMA Pediatrics* in 2024 found that approximately one in four American children, about 19 million in total, lives with at least one parent who has some form of substance use disorder. Alcohol was by far the most common substance involved.

These children are not merely numbers in a report. They are boys and girls in classrooms, in pews, and in homes. They hear the arguments. They learn when to stay quiet. They make excuses for the parent who cannot get up in the morning. They carry shame they did not earn and burdens they were never meant to bear.

The intergenerational effects of alcohol misuse have been studied for decades. Researchers connected with

the University of Missouri, the University of Michigan, and the Minnesota Twin Family Study have all contributed to the same broad conclusion: children of parents with alcohol problems are at significantly higher risk of developing alcohol problems themselves. According to summaries published by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, adult children of parents with alcohol use disorder are also at elevated risk for mood disorders, anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, alcohol use disorder, and premature death.

The Bible illustrates this principle in the lives of Noah and Lot.¹ A father's sin does not always end with the father. Sometimes it follows into the next generation.

THE COST TO THE MIND

The Bible does not merely warn that alcohol ruins the body. It warns that alcohol attacks the mind. That is why the scripture says, ***“Wine is a mocker”*** (Proverbs 20:1). It deceives. That is why Proverbs 31 says kings must not drink wine, ***“lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted”*** (Proverbs 31:5). The bottle does not sharpen judgment, but actually diminishes it.

Modern brain research has only confirmed what the Bible said all along. Amen Clinics, known for its work with brain SPECT imaging, has warned that alcohol affects the brain in serious ways. Their summaries point to research associating alcohol use with smaller brain

1. See the appendix “Generational Consequences” for more details on the lives of Noah and Lot.

volume, reduced blood flow, hippocampal atrophy, poorer memory, slower communication between brain cells, impaired judgment, and increased risk of dementia.

Alcohol can lower communication between neurons, affect neurotransmitters, weaken self-control, impair memory, and alter regions involved in judgment, mood, learning, and decision-making.

That lines up exactly with the Bible. God commands the believer to be sober and vigilant. Alcohol works in the opposite direction. It slows reaction, dulls discernment, weakens restraint, and makes a man more vulnerable to foolish decisions.

If the world's own brain research tells us that alcohol impairs judgment, memory, and self-control, then the child of God has one more earthly witness to the heavenly truth: strong drink is no friend to the mind.

THE CHRISTIAN QUESTION

The statistics become especially grievous when the subject turns to professing Christians.

The Barna Group, in research published in 2017 from surveys conducted in 2016, reported that approximately 60 percent of self-described practicing Christians in the United States consume alcohol at least occasionally. Among those identified as evangelicals, the figure was approximately 46 percent. Barna defined practicing Christians as those who attend a religious service at least monthly and who say their faith is very important in their lives.

LifeWay Research, in a 2017 survey of Protestant churchgoers reported by Baptist Press, found that 87

percent of Protestant churchgoers agreed that the Bible says people should never get drunk. Yet only 23 percent believed that the Bible indicates people should never drink alcohol at all.

That gap reveals much about the modern church. Many believers are willing to condemn drunkenness, but far fewer are willing to question the drink that leads to it. They will rebuke the wreckage while defending the road that carries men there.

CONCLUSION

The Bible did not need modern research in order to be right. It had already told us that **“wine is a mocker”** and that **“strong drink is raging”** (Proverbs 20:1). It had already commanded men not even to look upon the wine when it is red (Proverbs 23:31). It had already warned of the sorrow, wounds, perversion, and bondage that follow the cup.

Alcohol kills. Alcohol breaks homes. Alcohol wounds children. Alcohol fills graveyards, courtrooms, hospitals, and divorce records. The world may dress it up, advertise it, tax it, toast with it, and laugh over it, but the end of the thing has not changed.

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