



Pet. 4:4). None of these arguments justifies social drinking when the whole of Scripture is considered. If we truly focus on the good of the kingdom and the wellbeing of others, how could we ever defend such an activity? Let us strive to **“put on the Lord Jesus Christ”** and refuse to **“make provision for the flesh”** (Rom. 13:14).

the medicinal use of alcohol for physical illness. If social drinking were acceptable, why would Paul have had to tell Timothy it was permissible for him to drink wine for health reasons? Did Paul say, “Use a little wine for the sake of socializing with the boys”? Hardly. Someone may counter, “Well, deacons were not ‘to be given to much wine’” (1 Tim. 3:8) as if a little bit would be all right. The condemnation of excesses does not justify other sins. For instance, Peter condemned **“much rioting,”** yet that was not intended to justify some rioting (1

Sources

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Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Other Judgment Impairing Behaviors

By Bruce Reeves

Introduction

The apostle Paul wrote, **“Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Thess. 5:21-23). As faithful Christians, we should commit ourselves to the teaching of the Lord. As a result, we must **“abstain from every form of evil.”** Paul is not merely describing innocent activities that may look bad; rather, he affirms the fact that evil may express itself in different ways.

The Need for a Clear Mind

The New Testament frequently exhorts us to be **“sober in our spirit”** and to be of **“sound judgment”** (1 Cor. 15:34; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). Although this is a general encouragement to protect our hearts from the influences of sin, the metaphor itself implies the danger of losing clarity of judgment through intoxication.

The loss of judgment due to alcohol and drug abuse is a significant sign of addiction. Diminished discernment caused by alcohol or drugs leads one to start making irrational and risky decisions that prove detrimental to one’s spiritual, social, physical, and psycho-

logical health. Drugs contain chemicals that can upset the brain's natural communication system and cause the mind to process information differently.

Eventually, to get the initial effect that was produced when the person first started using drugs, he will have to keep increasing the amount he takes, which is how the cycle of addiction enslaves. The most common types of drugs that are notable for impairing one's judgment are cocaine, marijuana, opioids, alcohol, prescription depressants, and prescription stimulants.¹ All of these can result in a greater or lesser degree of reaction time. One's judgment of speed, spatial awareness, and the ability to assess danger becomes distorted. This can put you, and others around you, in danger. It also seriously undermines your ability to make spiritual, moral, and

ethical decisions, impacting not only your individual wellbeing but also that of others.

The Danger of Alcohol on Our Youth

Alcohol is the most commonly used mind-altering substance in the U.S. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates 37 million U.S. adults—or 1 in 6—binge drink² about once a week, consuming an average of seven drinks per binge. As a result, U.S. adults consume about 17 billion binge drinks annually or about 470 binge drinks per binge drinker. Binge drinking is most common among younger adults 18-34 years old. It is associated with car crashes, alcohol poisoning, violence, homicide, suicide, sexual assault, sexually transmitted diseases, and memory and learning problems—many consequences of alcohol abuse point toward a loss of clarity in decision making. Alcohol impacts the inhibitions in the brain by affecting the neurotransmitter that acts as a stimulant, which in turn hinders people from considering consequences.

The *2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey* found that, among high school students, during the past thirty days, 30% drank some amount of alcohol, 14% binge drank, 6% drove after drinking alcohol, and 17% rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol. In 2018, the *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* reported that 19% of youth ages twelve to twenty drink alcohol, and 12% reported binge drinking in the past 30 days. In 2019, *Monitoring the Future Survey* reported that 8% of 8th graders and 30% of 12th graders drank during the past thirty days. Also, 4% of 8th graders and 14% of 12th graders binge drank during the past two weeks. By age fifteen, about 29.8% of teens have had at least one drink. By age eighteen, about 58% of teens have had at least one drink. In 2018, 7.1 million young people ages twelve to twenty reported that, in the past month, they drank alcohol beyond “just a few sips.”

It is clear from these statistics that alcohol serves as a threat to Christians of all ages, reaching even to the very young. What leads those who are so young to drink? It may be peer-pressure,

¹ Prescription medications may be needed for legitimate reasons under medical care, but these substances must not be abused.

² This typically happens when men consume 5 or more drinks or women consume 4 or more drinks in about 2 hours.

development of alcohol dependence, negative influences at home, or unhealthy coping mechanisms for stress. A healthy relationship with Christ will help us overcome the obstacles in life that might lead us down the wrong path (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12).

It is also essential for parents to be observant of their children's behavior, friends, personality traits, and conduct. If there are red flags, parents can see the problem their family is facing. There are several things parents may do to meet these challenges beginning with a healthy spiritual life, honest conversations about alcohol, and participating in a local congregation that takes a stand on this issue.

What Does the Bible Teach on the Subject?

The Danger of Alcohol

Drunkenness is condemned as a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21); it is forbidden as a fulfillment of the lusts of the flesh (Rom. 13:11-14); it is described as bringing harm and sorrow (Prov. 23:29-35), as well as mockery and a waste of life (Prov. 20:1; Eph. 5:17-18). Solomon writes, **“Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last, it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things and your mind will utter perverse things. . . . When shall I awake? I will seek another drink”** (Prov. 23:29-33, 35). To avoid the *at last* (“it stings like a viper”), we must avoid the *at first* (“do not look on the wine”). The venom of a viper is poisonous; thus, the Bible emphatically admonishes us to avoid the influence of alcohol.

By including *pharmakeia* in the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20), Paul also condemns the illicit use of drugs—included in the ancient art of sorcery. The recreational use of drugs cannot be justified by sober-minded saints.

Reasons to Avoid Alcohol

We are taught to care for the physical body, as it is the **“temple of the Holy Spirit”** (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Accordingly,

those things that would abuse the body or unnecessarily harm our wellbeing must be avoided. Sacred Scripture also warns us against associating with **“heavy drinkers”** and their influence on our choices (Prov. 23:20-21). We must protect our reputation and our influence on others by guarding our actions and the behaviors we support (Eph. 5:10-11).

Is It Wrong to Drink Socially?

The Bible does not support modern attempts to argue that social drinking is permissible. It is noteworthy that the apostle Peter condemns both **“drinking parties”** and **“drunkenness”** (1 Pet. 4:3).³ Others will reference 1 Timothy 5:23 when Paul instructed Timothy, **“No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.”** It should be noted that there is a big difference between social drinking and

³ Interestingly, the legal authorities have a very strict standard for the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream that constitutes a DUI and disables one from being able to make wise decisions when operating a vehicle.