

A Defense for Soberness and Abstinence from Alcohol

Luke Duncan

www.SoundDoctrine4Today.org
February 6, 2021

Abstract. This study presents both a rational and scriptural defense for soberness and abstinence from alcohol. For the rational defense, 5 points are proposed which the author believes most born-again believers would accept as premises for the argument for abstinence. Following the rational defense, a scriptural defense is provided wherein the author presents 8 areas in which alcohol can impair the spiritual life. Born-again believers are called to be sober and vigilant as soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ. The paper concludes with a brief FAQ.

1 Rational Defense

Outline of Study

1. Rational Defense
2. Scriptural Defense
3. FAQ (added to as necessary)

If you are reading this with the expectation of finding flaws in my reasoning for the defense for abstinence from alcohol because you yourself enjoy your glass of alcohol, I want you to consider one question:

Why do you drink?

Is it so that you can become more like our Lord? Is that why? Is it so that, in drinking, you may wipe away enough depressing or sorrowful thoughts so that you may better rejoice in the Lord?

Just take a moment to consider why you drink. I believe if you were honest and if you were under the impression that the Bible teaches it is okay to drink, you would have to admit that whatever reasons you have for drinking are not so you can satisfy your spiritual desires. It would be to satisfy a carnal desire. In this study I will lay out 8 Biblical reasons for abstaining from alcohol. But knowing that this subject appears to be confrontational, I wanted to begin with a simple rational defense centered on 5 propositions. I believe these 5 propositions would be accepted by all born-again believers, but just in case, I present a brief argument for each proposition.

1. No one can call the partaking of alcohol “Good”

And by “partaking of alcohol” I am referring to the act of drinking alcohol as either a sip or in large quantities. I argue that if even you don’t believe drinking alcohol is bad, you sure can’t say it is good. Would you ever say that God would get glory by drinking a glass of wine?

2. Every born-again believer should at the very least be able to give alcohol up

Even if the Bible did not specifically call out the partaking of alcohol as a sin, it would at the very least be a stumblingblock to spiritual living. In the words of Hebrew 12:1, it would be a “weight” that could beset us in the spiritual race we are to run. You would never think, “Oh I just want to spend a moment doing something for my Lord. I think I’ll just take a sip of beer!” Of course no born-again believer would think that! You may think, “Well, what about TV? What about sports? We never directly serve the Lord in those activities.” And you would be right. For anything that is not considered “spiritually good,” we should be able to drop at a moment’s notice. Am I saying you should get rid of your TV? Nope. Am I saying you should pull your child out of sports? Nope. But there are indeed many Christian homes throughout the world that would do well to get rid of their TV and pull their children out of sports. I have personally known children who grew up in families whose lives surrounded sports, and sports drew those children to the wrong crowd. I wonder how much of the worldly language, traditions, and attitudes found in the homes of born-again believers throughout the world owe their existence to the TV in the home.

3. At the very least, excessive partaking of alcohol is a sin

“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

It is very clear from these verses that drunkenness is a sin, and it is uncharacteristic of a born-again believer. In regard to what the secular world has to say about the meaning of “drunkenness,” one website¹ defined drunkenness as the state of someone with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.09–0.25%. They call this stage, “excitement,” and say it is the third stage of alcohol intoxication. They call the first stage, “sobriety,” and the second stage, “Euphoria.” The website claims that in the stage of “sobriety” the person should feel like their normal self. In the second stage, the website claims, “You might feel more confident and chatty. You might have a slower reaction time and lowered inhibitions.” At the very least, the “drunkenness” of Galatians 5:21 would have to be the third stage which the world classifies as drunkenness. But as we will see later, if drinking alcohol would impair your bodily temple or empower your flesh as the website claims would happen in the second stage, it is still unbecoming of a Christian. So I will claim that the “drunkenness” of Galatians 5:21 would also encapsulate that second phase of intoxication which the secular world calls “euphoria.” For the first stage of intoxication in which the website claims that person would feel normal, my question is, why would somebody drink it then? For the taste? From what I’ve been told, I doubt that would be the reason. Others have explained that in the first stage of intoxication the body is relaxed. Later in the paper I will explain how this method of dealing with anxiety and stress is unbiblical and unbecoming of a Christian. If there are other options to quench your thirst, why partake in something that has the appearance of evil and has destroyed so many lives?

4. Many lives are destroyed by alcohol

The following facts are taken from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)²

- (a) Over 10% of children in the United States live with a parent with alcohol problems.
- (b) Each year, approximately 97,000 college students will experience alcohol-related sexual assault or rape.
- (c) Each year, about 1 in 4 college students will report academic consequences from drinking alcohol.
- (d) Drunk driving accounts for 31% of overall driving fatalities which makes it the leading cause of death on US roads.

¹ <https://www.healthline.com/health/what-does-it-feel-like-to-be-drunk>

² <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/alcohol-facts-and-statistics>

- (e) Alcohol is the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States after tobacco and poor diet/physical inactivity.
- (f) Globally, alcohol is the top leading risk factor for premature death for people between the ages of 15 and 49.
- (g) In 2010, the misuse of alcohol cost the United States \$249 billion. It’s nice to know our taxes are getting put to good use.

According to the World Health Organization, alcohol contributes to over 200 diseases and injury-related health conditions. Think about how many gruesome deaths were caused by alcohol-related health impairments. Think about how many families were broken from the news that their loved one died as a result of drunk driving. Think about how the lives of countless children, wives, and husbands were destroyed from the devastating impact of alcohol on the family³. So many lives are completely destroyed by alcohol, yet every single person I have met who I know drinks acts as if they have no problems at all with it. Why would you partake in something that has destroyed so many lives?

5. An allowing attitude toward alcohol in religious people can make drunkards feel more comfortable in their sin.

I believe most every born-again believer would agree with this statement. Although mainstream religion is digressing farther and farther and is becoming increasingly unrespected, I have still witnessed much reverence among the heathen for anything that is the least religious. I have seen hardened criminals with the foulest language try their best to act respectable in the presence of a preacher.

Who struggles the most with alcoholism? I remember speaking with a very wealthy Presbyterian on this subject several years ago. He said that he and his wife typically enjoy a glass of wine together each night and that they have never had a problem with excessive drunkenness. But what about the homeless drunk on the street? What about the Presbyterian’s neighbor who spends a large portion of his paycheck on alcohol? Even if that Presbyterian and his wife were able to limit their drinking so that they would not be considered “drunk,” not everyone else is so fortunate. Born-again believers should never come across as “stuck-up,” but in these dark days, I believe it would do the world much good for God’s people to make a stand against sin. I have worked with many hardened lost sinners, and without me having to say anything, they would apologize for their language or turn off their worldly

³ For more information on how alcoholism destroys families, take some time to read <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/alcoholism-treatment/family-marital-problems>

music. You don't have to act stuck up to be respected.

joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: But a man of understanding walketh uprightly" (Proverbs 15:21).

2 Scriptural Defense

What I have presented so far is simply a rational defense against the use of alcohol, although I did include some scripture. In the next section, I present 8 ways alcohol will impair the spiritual life of a born-again believer. Paul said in Philippians 3:14, *"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* Paul had a calling, and it was indeed a high calling. If you are reading this as a lost person, I want you to know that you are called to be saved. God is *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). But if you are a child of God already, you have right now a high calling. And we all should be pressing toward the mark of this high calling, not backwards. I'm sure there are plenty more examples of how alcohol impairs our lives, but in these eight areas we will find that alcohol impairs our *spiritual* lives. God's people should desire to please our Lord in all areas of our lives. I pray you will consider what scripture says on this topic.

Awareness

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."
—Ephesians 5:15–16

The first area in which alcohol impairs our spiritual lives is in the area of awareness. Ephesians 5:15–16 says, *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."* It is God's will for us to walk circumspectly. This means we are to always be watching around us for both dangers and blessings. Fools don't do this. Fools have no clue what's going on around them. Put a fool on the job of building a house and he'll fall right through an unfinished floor. Put a fool behind the steering wheel of a car and he'll wreck the car in a moment's notice. Put a fool in a spiritual battle and he'll turn his eyes away from Jesus and earn to himself a pitiful defeat. Born-again believers are called to be aware. You may say, "Well I only drink a glass of wine when my day's work is ended." Okay. So what if your child comes to you to ask spiritual advice? Are you aware enough to know how to respond? What if a tragedy occurs. Are you walking circumspectly enough to be able to understand what God wants you to do? What if something comes up on your phone or computer screen that is displeasing to the Lord. Are you aware enough to not give into the temptation? When the Lord saves us, He also called us to a high calling for which we should be ready always at His command. You cannot do this and be intoxicated with alcohol at the same time. *"Folly is*

Sobriety

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

—1 Peter 5:8

Related to the discussion of awareness and circumspection is the subject of sobriety. The word "sober" comes from the Latin "sobrius" which literally means, "without intoxication." One sip of alcohol intoxicates your blood, and by the very definition you are technically not sober anymore. However, when we find sobriety in the Bible, it often carries with it two ideas: 1) control over the flesh and 2) control over the mind.

Control Over the Flesh

Let's first look at what it means to have control over the flesh. In Acts 26:24–25, Festus accuses of Paul of being mad or crazy as a result of study, and Paul replies, *"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."* Paul is saying that he is not speaking from passion or through an uncontrolled tongue. He is speaking out of self-control. 1 Thessalonians 5:6 commands, *"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."* We are to be aware, but along with awareness we need to have full control of ourselves. The same idea is found in 1 Peter 5:8 where Peter warns, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, one of the qualifications for a bishop (pastor) is that he should be sober. He should have control over his flesh. Another word for having control of our flesh is "moderation." *"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand"* (Philippians 4:5). What does it mean to moderate? From the etymology of the English word, it means to control something by reducing. The context of Philippians teaches us that no matter what afflictions, persecutions, and strife we go through, we are to have control over our flesh. *"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again, I say, Rejoice."* There's no need to worry about the present afflictions. We are to have control over our fleshly tendencies to be downhearted and depressed. We are to control our flesh by *reducing* our fleshly responses and *increasing* our gentleness and kindness. In other words, let our moderation be known unto all men. *"The Lord is at hand."* You cannot have control over your flesh while being intoxicated with alcohol.

Control Over the Mind

The second way we are to be sober is by having con-

trol over our minds. In Luke 8:35 we read, *“Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.”* This is the account where Jesus cast the demons out of a man in the country of the Gadarenes. The Greek word translated “in his right mind” is translated “soberly” in Romans 12:3. What was the state of the demon-possessed man of Gadara when the demons were cast out? He had control of his mind. That should be the state of every born-again child of God. *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”* (Romans 12:3). We are called to think right! Paul commands Titus, *“Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded”* (Titus 2:6). You can’t be sober minded when your brain is intoxicated with alcohol.

Ability to Pray

“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.”
—1 Peter 4:7

We are living in the last days. According to 2 Timothy 2:13, evil men and seducers are going to wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. So what should be our response? *“Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.”* We’ve just covered sobriety, but here in this verse I want to emphasize the need to be sober for the purpose of giving ourselves to prayer. I’m going to walk very quickly through the verses in Mark 14:32–42. In this passage we find Jesus and His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane the night before Jesus was crucified. Jesus was carrying a heavy burden and was *“exceeding sorrowful unto death.”* He took with Him Peter, James, and John to accompany Him during this time of affliction. He commands them, *“tarry ye here, and watch.”* While they were supposed to be watching, Jesus went off to pray. Not long afterwards, he returned to find Peter, James, and John sleeping. He tells them, *“Simon, sleepest thou? Coudest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.”* Notice that when Jesus returned to find His disciples sleeping that He says, *“the spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.”* And this weakness of flesh resulted in the disciples sleeping instead of watching. Jesus went another time to pray and, when He returned, He once again found them sleeping. In this instance, the Bible says, *“And when he returned he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him.”* Jesus went the third time to pray, and when He returned this final time, He found them sleeping. According to a parallel account in Luke 22:45, the

disciples were said here to be *“sleeping for sorrow.”* So why do I bring this up? The disciples were to be praying in support of the Lord Jesus Christ while He was carrying the burden of the sin of the whole world. They were also to be praying for themselves so that they would be able to resist temptation. But they were not sober, and the reason why they were not sober was because of the weakness of their flesh. Notice these observations after each of the Lord’s returns in the garden:

1. 1st Return: Although the “spirit truly is ready,” the “flesh is weak.”
2. 2nd Return: Because of the heaviness of sleep, the disciples did not know how to answer the Lord
3. 3rd Return: The disciples were sleeping for sorrow

Many people who claim to be Christians think it is fine to have one glass of beer or wine because it would not get them drunk. I’ve been told that this first glass generally puts the drinker in a relaxed state. In other words, the body becomes weaker. When Jesus said, *“the flesh is weak,”* He was implying that the body was having a hard time fighting against the carnal nature. The carnal nature within the disciples was resisting against prayer. The carnal nature did not want anything to do with praying. And the body was weak in its fight against these sinful tendencies, though the spiritual nature within themselves was willing to fight. There have been many times when I knew I should pray before I went to bed, but my carnal nature fought against it. My body was worn out, sleepy, and weak. Sometimes my flesh would win the battle. But there were also times when as sleepy as I was and as much as my carnal nature did not want anything to do with praying, the Lord gave me strength to pray. *“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). If you are saved, the Mighty God lives within you. He is greater than all that is in the world. When we know we are to pray in the weakness of our flesh, we need to reach out to the Lord our Strength.

Notice in the second return that the disciples did not know how to answer the Lord. In Romans 12:12 we read, *“continuing instant in prayer.”* To be continuing instant in prayer means that we are to be “at hand.” Just as a good waiter at a fancy restaurant is always at hand to serve, we are always to be continually waiting upon our Lord, ready to answer and commune with Him at all times. One of the reasons why the Lord expected His disciples to watch and pray was that they would not *“enter into temptation.”* There have been times when I gave into temptation that I felt unfit to pray afterwards. We are still expected to pray. But being in sin should make us feel guilty. I am ashamed to come before God’s throne of grace after giving into sin. I sure have a hard time coming boldly before God’s throne of grace. However, there have been many times

when, being an attitude of prayer and communion with God, I was given the strength to resist the temptation. Oftentimes the difference between giving into temptation and resisting is the quality of the communion with God. Are you ready to answer the Lord?

Finally, in the third return we find according to Luke 22:45 that the disciples were “*sleeping for sorrow.*” I understand this very well, and I would guess you do too. There have times when I was in a state of sorrow from a death of a loved one or from heart break, and the number one thing I wanted to do was sleep. If I managed to fall to sleep, I was able to forget my problems and put my depression to rest for a little while. Oftentimes, as a result of stress my joints would tense up, and after several days of this my back and neck would start to hurt. During these times, it would be nice to somehow force our bodies to relax. One way is to try to go to sleep. Another is to drink a “harmless” glass of alcohol. In this day of lukewarm churches, weak and powerless Christians, and false Christianity, we have learned to rely on everything else and anyone else but our Lord. “*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you*” (1 Peter 5:7). Why not turn to your Lord? We have a blessing that the Old Testament saints did not have. Yes, they were saved the same way. But they did not have the blessings of Christ in the heart like born-again believers have today. But how often do we take advantage of this blessing? It’s a lot easier for us to rely on other things for our cares.

Ability to Fight

”Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”

—Ephesians 6:14–18

Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, with his mighty army was ready to destroy Israel once and for all. But what happened? “*Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him*” 1 Kings 20:16. In Syria’s drunkenness they were caught off guard, and Israel utterly defeated them.

In 2 Samuel 13:28–29, we read the account where Absalom takes advantage of drunkenness to slaughter: “*Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon’s heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. And the servants of Absalom did*

unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king’s sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled.”

1 Kings 16:8–10 describes how Zimri took advantage of king Baasha’s drunkenness to assassinate him and take the crown. Daniel 5 gives an account of Belsazzar’s drunkenness the night Babylon fell to the Persians. Drunkenness marks the sign of defeat. I realize this goes along with the discussions we have already covered on awareness and sobriety, but I believe we need to point out this truth: Every born-again believer is a soldier in the Lord’s army, and we must be ready always to stand strong in the heat of our spiritual battles. Many kings and soldiers throughout history were vanquished in their drunkenness. A born-again believer has no business whatsoever touching that which has destroyed countless lives. I’m going to end this section with Ephesians 6:10–18. If in this instant you are still not convinced that a born-again believer should abstain from alcohol, I want you to read these verses and point your finger at the place in this passage where alcohol would fit in. If you are honest, you cannot do it. If you are saved, you are called to live for your Holy General. You are called to be fully armed and ready to fight for your Lord.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”

—Ephesians 6:10–18

Ability to Discern

“And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, 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: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean;”

—Leviticus 10:8–10

The priests of the Old Testament were not allowed to drink alcohol, and the punishment was death. The reason given in verse 10 was the following: *“that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.”* If you are still trying to make an excuse for your drinking, you are unqualified to provide any opinion whatsoever. The priests needed to be able to discern between what was holy and clean from that which was unholy and unclean. If your flesh is longing after strong drink, you are unfit to make the right judgments. As born-again believers, we are called to be holy. *“Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (1 Peter 1:16). We need to be sober so that we can know what is sin and what is not sin.

Ability to Teach

“And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, 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: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: . . . And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.”

—Leviticus 10:8–9, 11

The second reason given for the priests’ abstinence from alcohol was this: *“that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.”* Do you remember the great commission Jesus gave to His disciples before He ascended to heaven? *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”* (Matthew 28:18–20).

Every single born-again believer is to take part in this commission. But notice that our Lord did not use the word “preach” in this commission. He used the word, “teach.” Preaching most definitely should continue. *“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”* (Romans 10:14). But where preaching focuses on proclaiming truth, teaching focuses on causing the listeners to accept truth⁴. If you want to teach others about Jesus, you can use illustrations and examples. You can tell them about what Christ did for you. You can guide them through Bible

doctrine. You can walk them through God’s plan of salvation in the Bible. And you can live a godly life. Just as with the priests of the Old Testament, if we are to be obedient to Christ’s Great Commission and teach this lost world, we must abstain from alcohol.

Spiritually-Victorious Living or Filling of the Holy Spirit

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;”

—Ephesians 5:18–19

I’ve heard so many people talk as if this verse said, “And be not drunk to excess.” But that’s not what the verse says is it? It says, *“wherein is excess.”* Drinking wine IS excess. Instead of filling ourselves with wine, we are to be filled with the Spirit. When our body is filled with alcohol, our bodies may be relaxed. When our heart is filled with the Spirit, we can find rest. *“For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief”* (Hebrews 4:10–11). In being filled with the Holy Spirit, our carnal nature relinquishes its power and gives way to the spiritual nature. We therefore cease from our works and enter into the present day rest of the Lord (we’ll cover this subject further in a future study). I’ve talked with people who say that they don’t get drunk, but they just want to drink a little just to get relaxed after a stressful day. So when you do that, what are you relying upon?

Preachers don’t generally talk about being filled with the Spirit much nowadays. Reading after the preachers of old, I have found that the subject used to be very treasured among God’s people. In these days of conveniences, there are so many options to turn to for our problems. If we’re emotionally down a little bit, we can just turn the TV on for some comedy. If we want some excitement we put on some sports. If we want to be distracted from our problems, we scroll endlessly through our Facebook feed. Once upon a time, God’s people relied upon the Lord during these moments. In Galatians 5:19, Paul names drunkenness as a work of the flesh, but in contrast he presents the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Which of these fruits are increased by alcohol? Don’t fill yourself with alcohol. *“Be filled with the Spirit.”*

Testimony

“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.”

⁴ See <https://sounddoctrine4today.org/2020/04/22/doctrinal-study-teaching-and-what-the-old-testament-says-about-it>
<https://sounddoctrine4today.org/2020/04/21/spiritual-gifts-part-5/>

—Genesis 9:20–21

Finally, I end this discussion with the point that giving place to alcohol damages our *testimony*. This is seen in the examples of Noah and Lot, two righteous people. Let's first look at Noah.

“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8). Noah was indeed a righteous man, but we must not forget that even Noah had sinful nature. In Genesis 9:20–21 we read, *“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.”* There was first of all the shame of nakedness. In the next verse, we read that Ham saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers. Nakedness was a shame. Without anyone having to tell Adam and Eve, when their eyes were opened and they had knowledge of sin, the first thing they became ashamed of was their nakedness. If Noah had remained sober, his testimony would not have been damaged. Notice what happens in verse 24: *“And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.”* I leave the interpretation up to the reader, but it is a possibility that when Ham saw the nakedness of his father he didn't stop there. If Ham did in fact go even further into sin in that passage, Noah would have been disgraced even further. What could have prevented this? If Noah didn't drink the first sip.

Lot was another man who was declared righteous. In 2 Peter 2:7–8 we read, *“And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)”* I believe we can conclude that Lot was indeed a justified Old Testament saint. After God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot went to dwell in a mountain, being fearful to stay in the city of Zoar. Only his two daughters were with him. His wife was too salty to join them. In this mountain, we find this conversation between Lot's two daughters: *“And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth: Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father”* (Genesis 19:31–32). That night, they managed to get their father drunk, and the firstborn lay with her father. They managed to get him drunk the next night, and the younger daughter lay with him. Lot was not aware that any of this took place. As a blemish on Lot's name throughout history, the firstborn daughter named this son she bore through incest, “Moab,” meaning, “from the father.” As Moab grew up, Lot would have been reminded that it was because of his drunkenness that he committed incest. Moab's descendants became a mighty nation. Moab was a vexation to Israel and we find them referred to a lot in the Old Testament. With each mention

of the Moabites, Lot's testimony is further tainted. All because of drunkenness. What could have prevented this? If Lot didn't drink the first sip, or better yet, if they didn't bring along the alcohol on the trip from Zoar.

I'll close this section with one more brief thought concerning our testimony. This point touches on a doctrine that hardly ever gets preached or taught but is clearly defined in the Bible. I call it the “doctrine of stumblingblocks.” When you find a moment, read Romans 14. Paul opens up the chapter by contrasting two people, both of which are born-again believers. One will eat all things, but the other “who is weak” eats herbs. The idea in this passage is that there were some people in the church who would abstain from meat because meat was offered to idols. They thought they were doing a good work by abstaining from meat because, in their mind, meat reminded them of idolatry. However, Paul clearly says that it is perfectly fine to eat meat. In a matter of fact, Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:3–5, *“Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”* But in Romans 14, Paul lays out a simple truth: *“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.”* Even if you thought it was okay to drink alcohol, why would you cause your brother to offend? Why would you partake in something that has damaged the testimony of many throughout history? Why would you encourage others to drink and begin a habit that could possibly turn to their destruction? The only reason you would do it is to satisfy your own lust.

3 Conclusion

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”
—1 Corinthians 6:9–12

When the Lord saves a soul, that person should be willing to put away anything that would be displeasing to their Lord. Many churchgoers are all the time

thinking to themselves, “Can I get away with such-and-such? Is this allowed?” But we should instead be thinking, “What can I do more to serve my Lord?” Paul said that though all things were lawful for him, he was not going to be brought under the power of any. Our lives should be unreservedly dedicated to our Lord.

4 FAQ

1. When we read “wine” in the Bible, doesn’t it mean it’s fermented?

Nope. Satan is referred to as the “*god of this world*” in 2 Corinthians 4:4. He knows drunkenness contributed to the downfall of every nation. He knows how much it has destroyed lives. The first time we encounter Satan in the Bible is in Genesis 3:1–5. In this passage we find him placing doubt on God’s Word and adding to and removing from God’s Word. Doesn’t it make sense that he would do the same today? Look at the word “wine.” What does it look like? It looks like the word, “vine.” In some languages, the letters “v” and “w” are often used interchangeably. Our English word “wine” originally just simply denoted a juice derived from the grape vine. However, because society would rather be drunk than sober, the word “wine” began to exclusively denote fermented grape juice. Depending on its context in scripture, it could mean either fermented or unfermented grape juice. It would be worth noting that in the times of the Old Testament, they did not have Coke, Dr. Pepper, or Mountain Dew. Unfermented grape juice is invigorating. If you have ever been on a fast for more than a few days and you break your fast with grape juice, you will find that those first few sips of grape juice will quickly invigorate you. Energy will course through your veins. No other drink would do that in the Old Testament times.

There are three main words in the Hebrew language translated “wine” or “strong drink.” The first word is “shekar” and is translated “strong drink” 21 times and “strong wine” 1 time. Apart from the one instance in which it is translated “strong wine,” it is generally accepted to refer to beer. In Proverbs 20:1 we read, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” It’s very clear from this passage that a wise man will not be deceived by strong drink. I want to be wise. Don’t you?

There is also the word, “yayin.” This word denotes fermented wine. Jewish tradition says the word “yayin” came from “yalal” which means “to wail in lamentation.” Proverbs 23:31 says, “*Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.*” It is very clear that there is nothing good

about this wine in this verse. In a matter of fact, if you read Proverbs 23:29–35, I believe you will find that there is curse upon this fermented wine.

Lastly, there is the word, “tirosh.” This is translated as “new wine” 10 times and “wine” 27 times. It comes from a word which means “to tread or press.” It’s also known as “sweet wine” to Jews. The ancient civilizations utilized several methods for preserving unfermented wine. One method was to boil down the grape juice to a syrup which could be preserved and then diluted with water when it was to be used. Another method was to boil the grape juice down with minimum evaporation and then seal it in an airtight container. The product from these processes was an unfermented beverage known to be extremely sweet and rich. This is a well-accepted fact among historians of ancient civilization. So my question is, if these methods were known and widely used in the ancient world, why wouldn’t it have a representation in the Bible? I believe it is obvious that “tirosh” signifies unfermented wine, either freshly squeezed from a cluster of grapes (Isaiah 65:8) or preserved (Hosea 9:2; Joel 1:10).

2. Did Jesus drink wine?

Many people point to Jesus’ first miracle at the marriage of Cana in Galilee to argue that it is alright to drink wine because Jesus drank wine. Again, when we read the word “wine,” we must understand the context in which it was written. Marriage in the Bible was highly honored and was to be pure and holy. Leaven is throughout the Bible representative of sin. When Nadab and Abihu offered strange incense in the house of the Lord in Leviticus 10, a fire went out from the Lord and devoured them. It is immediately after this instance that the Lord explains in verses 9–11 why priests were to abstain from alcohol (See “Ability to Discern” and “Ability to Teach” earlier in the paper). In the next verse, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s other two sons were consecrated for service, and they were told to eat the meat offering “*without leaven beside the altar: for it is most holy.*” Leaven made things unholy. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:8, “*Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*” Why would something representing wickedness and sin be found at a wedding? Why would there be something found at a Jewish wedding that was preached against in Proverbs 20:1, Proverbs 23:31, and Habakkuk 2:15–17? Jesus was during his ministry, as represented in Psalm 22, acting as priest. Why would he drink something that the priests of the Old Testament were commanded to abstain from? Jesus was the Great Teacher! Jesus knew at all times what was holy and unholy! Why would

he drink something fermented when He was about His Father's business every single day of His life? Why would our Lord give strong drink to people at the marriage when Habakkuk 2:15–17 pronounces a woe upon such?!

3. Did Paul tell Timothy to drink wine for his stomach?

Nope. Here is the verse: *“Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities”* (1 Timothy 5:23). Firstly, I will comment that I do not believe it advisable for a born-again believer to use wine for sickness. Why would you? With advancement in medicinal knowledge, there are all kinds of alternatives for any illness that may have been treated in the past by alcohol. I believe it would be very advisable to not even look at the wine (Proverbs 23:31). With that being said, notice that Paul never tells Timothy to drink wine. He says *“use a little wine.”* Do you see the difference? If Paul was indeed advising Timothy to use fermented wine for his sicknesses, he sure did not mean for Timothy to *drink* wine. The picture here would be more akin to a *spoonful* rather than a chug. So I'm not sure why this verse is even a popular one to quote for one seeking to defend their drinking. But notice one more thing about this verse. Paul first says, *“drink no longer water.”* If you go into a doctor's office for sickness, what doctor would tell you, “Oh, I'm sorry, you don't need to be drinking any more water.” Water is good for you! Many times water alone will bring healing much faster. This may just indicate that there is a spiritual application Paul is making to Timothy seeing as how this verse is rather bluntly shoved into the middle of a passage on being pure in the midst of a church.

4. Isn't it okay to give people wine who are near death or who are of heavy hearts?

The passage in question is found in Proverbs 31:6–7, *“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.”* Yep, that is indeed scripture. Just on a side note, the two verses immediately preceding this passage says, *“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.”* So this would not be a good passage for someone to use to defend their drinking, because we should definitely be sober enough to discern between right and wrong. But going back to the issue in question, notice when this verse was given. It was given before the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When someone in the church is heavy of heart, would Paul recommend that they drink a beer? When Paul was heavy of heart in 2

Corinthians 12, the Lord's response was, *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). In Philippians 4:6 we read, *“Be careful for nothing.”* In this verse, to be *careful* means to be full of care or, in other words, “worrisome and anxious.” But notice that Paul did not write, “Be careful for nothing, but have yourself a can of beer.” No! He says, *“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”* In response to giving a dying man drink, in today's time there are many other alternatives. I believe this verse in Proverbs 31 is referring to someone literally at the point of death, but even if you were to argue that this is for someone who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness, Paul's example was to *“press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:14), not to drink away his last days.