

THE EVILS OF ALCOHOLISM: A SERMON

During his sermon, a minister was demonstrating the evil effects of alcohol. On his pulpit he had two glasses, one containing water and the other whiskey that had a very high alcoholic content. He produced a common earthworm and dropped it into the glass of water, then he removed the worm and held it wiggling before his congregation. “You see,” he said, “the worm still is quite alive.” He next took the same worm and dropped it into the glass of whiskey. The worm died instantly. “Now,” the minister challenged, “what does that prove?” The church was silent until an old drunk in the back of the room stumbled to his feet and declared, “It proves that if ya’ drink, ya’ won’t have worms!” Sometimes we take such matters as this lightly, but it is a very serious matter. Truly, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverb 20.1).¹

Alcoholism is one of the biggest drug problems in the United States today. According to the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), about 85 percent of people older than 18 said that they drank alcohol at some point in their life, 70 percent said they drank in the past year, and 56 percent said they drank in the past month. In 2015, about 27 percent older than 18 said they engaged in binge drinking during the past month, and 7 percent said they engaged in heavy alcohol use during the past month. According to the same study, roughly 15 million adults (ages 18 and older) and 623,000 adolescents (ages 12 to 17) had Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) with only 7 and 5 percent undergoing treatment, respectively. Every year an estimated 88,000

¹Scripture quotations unless noted otherwise are from *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments* (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson, 1952).

persons die from alcohol-related causes, and this makes alcohol abuse, after tobacco abuse and poor diet and physical inactivity, the third leading cause of death in the United States.²

In 2016 in the United States, roughly 10,500 persons died in alcohol-impaired crashes while driving an automobile, and this accounts for about 28% of all traffic related deaths in the country. In the same year, over one million drivers were arrested for driving under the influence of either alcohol or narcotics, which is about one percent of the approximately 111 million incidences of impairment from alcohol abuse that are self-reported annually by drivers in the United States.³ Alcohol consumption contributes significantly to criminal activities and to violence. On average, about 40 percent of the inmates, who are incarcerated for violent offenses, were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the crime. Many offenders had a blood alcohol content level over three times the limit allowed by law at the time of their arrest. These crimes range from minor to major incidences and include driving while intoxicated, violation of public order statutes, property theft and vandalism, domestic violence including child abuse, assault, homicide, and murder.⁴

²“Alcohol Facts and Statistics,” National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Washington, DC: National Institutes of Health, 2018), online at: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-facts-and-statistics> (accessed 3 October 2019).

³“Impaired Driving: Get the Facts,” Motor Vehicle Safety, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Washington, DC: National Institutes of Health, 2019), online at: https://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving/impaired-drv_factsheet.html (accessed 3 October 2019).

⁴Carol Galbicsek, “Alcohol-Related Crimes,” Alcohol Rehab Guide (Orlando, FL: Recovery Worldwide, LLC, 2019), online at: <http://www.alcoholrehabguide.org/alcohol/crimes/> (accessed 3 October 2019).

Alcohol addiction continues to be the leading cause of hospitalization and admittance to substance abuse rehabilitation centers in the country.⁵ And life expectancy for the habitual or hardened alcoholic seems to be roughly eight to ten years or about a decade less than normal. Alcohol abuse can be a factor in heart disease, cancer, lung diseases, strokes, and kidney disease which are some of the top ten causes of death in the United States at the present time.

With such negative effects attributable to excessive alcohol consumption, it is little wonder why the prophet Isaiah declared, “Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening till wine inflames them!” (Isaiah 5.11). And it is no marvel that the wise man of old said:

Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
 Who has strife? Who has complaining?
Who has wounds without cause?
 Who has redness of eyes?
Those who tarry long over wine,
 those who go to try mixed wine.
Do not look at wine when it is red,
 when it sparkles in the cup
 and goes down smoothly.
At the last it bites like a serpent,
 and stings like an adder.
Your eyes will see strange things,
 and your mind utter perverse things.
You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
 like one who lies on the top of a mast.
“They struck me,” you will say, “but I was not hurt;
 they beat me, but I did not feel it.
When shall I awake?
 I will seek another drink.”
[Proverbs 23.29-35].

⁵John Elflein, “Rate of Stays for Substance Abuse Disorders in the U.S. in 2016, By Substance (Per 100,000 Population),” Statista (New York, NY: Statista, Inc., 2019), online at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/990867/rate-of-substance-abuse-hospitalizations-by-substance-us/> (accessed 3 October 2019).

Not only does alcohol addiction hurt the individual, as illustrated clearly by the quote from the Bible's wisdom literature above, it hurts the nation economically and socially. In 2010, an estimated \$249 billion of the nation's economy was drained due to excessive alcohol use (mostly—77%—from “binge drinking”). This averages about \$3.5 billion per state and the District of Columbia or a little more than \$800 per person. But the true costs yearly, in terms of loss in workplace productivity, healthcare expenses, law enforcement and criminal justice expenses, and losses from motor vehicle accidents could soar well past the trillion dollar mark.⁶ Add to these costs the devastation to communities, families, and individual human lives, and the total tradeoff is simply astronomical and impossible to calculate. Many today are poor, both materially and spiritually, and possibly homeless because of alcohol and its ill effects. And the Bible states plainly that excessive drink leads to poverty. “He who loves wine and oil will not be rich” (Proverb 21.17). “For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty” (Proverb 23.21).

As for family life, the problem of too much strong drink and drunkenness is nothing new (i.e., broken homes, deserted families, child and spouse abuse). The first instance of drunkenness that is recorded in the Bible, that of the patriarch Noah in Genesis 9.20-26, resulted in immoral behavior and the cursing of Canaan, Noah's grandson. In Genesis 19.30-38, Lot, the nephew of Abraham, had two daughters who made their father drunk and committed incest with him in order to preserve their father's “seed” or “preserve offspring through [their] father.” Each of the daughters took their turn with Lot—one on the first night and the other on the next night—so the

⁶“Excessive Drinking Is Draining the U.S. Economy,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Washington, DC: National Institutes for Health, 2018), online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/features/costsofdrinking/index.html> (accessed 3 October 2019).

text describes Lot's condition twice with the same phrase—"he did not know when she lay down or when she arose" (verses 33 and 35). You see, a drunk man often has no awareness of his circumstance or his actions. But Lot's daughters accomplished their purpose and gave birth to two sons—Moab and Ammon—who became the progenitors of two of the most wicked peoples of Biblical times, the Moabites and the Ammonites. Yes, strong drink causes devastation in the home and turmoil in families. We read in 2 Samuel 13.28-29 how Ammon, in a drunken brawl, was murdered by his own brother, Absalom. And at a week-long feast of food and wine, King Ahasuerus, who was drunk, tried to force Vashti, his lovely queen, to submit herself to the sensual and inappropriate gazes of drunken nobles, but Vashti would not consent. This caused a separation between the royal husband and wife (Esther, chapter 1).

Certainly, from Biblical examples and from modern-day experience we can see the horrible sorrow and destruction that alcohol brings to homes and families. Consider the accurate and true-to-life description of two young boys in the following poem, called "Two Fathers":

He swung on the gate and looked down the street
Awaiting the sound of familiar feet,
Then suddenly came to the sweet child's eyes
The marvelous glory of morning skies;
For a manly form with a steady stride,
Drew near to the gate that opened wide,
As the boy sprang forward and joyfully cried,
'Papa's coming!'

The wasted face of another child
Looked out of the windows with eyes made wild,
By the ghastly shades in failing light,
And the glimpse of a drunk man in the night,
Cursing and reeling from side to side.
The poor boy trembling and trying to hide,
Clung to his mother's skirts and cried,
'Papa's coming!'

There is no doubt that wine and liquor have worked their evil on homes, on the nation, and on individuals.

But in spite of these truths, political leaders continue to promote and pass more lenient laws to allow greater access to fermented beverages (including beer, wine, and hard liquors) as well as to marijuana and nicotine products and even “harder” drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. Maybe this is because, in reality, there are three major parties in the District of Columbia and in our state capitals instead of just two—the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, and the cocktail party. And when we begin to highlight such negative facts as these, that expose alcohol as the poison and the moral evil that it is, those who sell or consume alcoholic beverages argue that it is nobody’s business if someone drinks or how much they drink. But it is our business! It is very much everyone’s business and concern. Listen to the following poem that explains this concern quite well:

“It’s nobody’s business what I drink;
I care not what my neighbors think,
Or how many laws they choose to pass;
I’ll tell the world I’ll have my glass!
Here’s one man’s freedom that cannot be curbed;
My right to drink is undisturbed.”

So, he drank in spite of law or man;
Then got into his old tin can,
Stepped on the gas and let it go,
Down the highways to and fro.

He took the curves at sixty miles,
With bleary eyes and drunken smiles.
Not long till a car he tried to pass;
Then a crash, a scream, and breaking glass.

The other car is upside down,
About two miles from the nearest town.

The man is clear, but his wife is caught
And she needs the help of the drunken sot,
Who sits in maudlin daze,
Hears the screams and sees the blaze.

But he's too far gone to save a life,
By helping the car from off the wife.
—The car is burned and a mother dies
A husband weeps and a baby cries,
And a drunk sits by—And still some think
It's nobody's business that they drink.

But perhaps we should not be too hard on alcohol and its abusers. Alcohol does have certain beneficial properties. Alcohol will remove grass stains from summer clothes. It will also remove summer clothes . . . and spring and winter clothes. It will remove food from the table, then remove the table. It will remove a smile from the face, happiness from the home, and then it will remove the home. “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverb 20.1).

Let me suggest three reasons why the use of beverage alcohol, even in moderation, is unwise and, in our culture and society, a “missing of the mark” or sinful with respect to a positive and wholesome Christian witness. First, the use of beverage alcohol is unwise and possibly sinful because it can harm the body. Our bodies do not belong to us but rather to the Creator who made us. Life is a gift from God, and we are only stewards of this precious and gracious endowment. The apostle Paul reflects on this perspective when he asks the believers at Corinth, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6.19-20). Alcohol is a depressant that acts principally on the body's central nervous system. It reaches the brain through the bloodstream, very quickly, and acts first on the

part of the brain that controls restraint and judgment. And, by this chemical transformation and process, cells in the brain are deteriorized and destroyed by alcohol. Not only do harder liquors have this harmful effect on the body but even the so-called “lighter” beverages as well. Beer, for instance, contains a mild narcotic ingredient called Lupulin that is similar to that found in cannabis or marijuana. So even these drinks can be detrimental to good health and the proper and decent function of our bodies.

Second, the use of beverage alcohol is unwise and possibly sinful because of the influence such behavior has on others. To do anything that might be a “stumbling block”⁷ to another person is to miss the mark for Christian witness in the world, and the use of beverage alcohol falls into that realm of Christian ethics. In this regard, the apostle Paul admonishes, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10.31-33). In this passage, Paul instructs the Christians at Corinth to abstain from eating meats, sold in the marketplace, that had been offered to idols during sacrificial rites to the gods and goddesses in the temples of the city. Paul says to abstain, because of the offense, or temptation to sin (i.e., by taking part in the pagan rituals), that such would cause to other believers.

⁷The Greek word is *skandalon* which borrows from “the imagery of trap-setting or the laying of an obstacle in another’s way” and indicates entrapment by way of enticement or a temptation to sin. See Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2009), 321-322. The Hebrew equivalent is *moqesh* which refers to a noose or snare, so metaphorically “a plot, strategem” or “a cause of injury.” Benjamin Davies, ed., *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, New Edition, rev. by Edward C. Mitchell (Boston, MA: A. I. Bradley, 1880), 342; Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, trans., *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (repr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 459.

With respect to alcoholic beverages and their moderate use, in a “booze” saturated society such as in the United States, Christians cannot be too careful. Even if “social drinking” did not cause any harm or create problems for an individual (i.e., he/she can “hold his/her liquor”), what about the influence on another who may not have the same degree of tolerance or self-control? If there is a chance that someone who sees my actions might follow my example and, as a result, become intoxicated, then I possibly may be morally responsible, to a degree, for the downfall of that person. On one occasion, a preacher and an elder, who both were social drinkers, encouraged a young preacher to drink with them. Though they remained social drinkers and never became intoxicated, the younger man later in life became an alcoholic. Did these church leaders sin by showing such a lack of love for their brother (e.g., in the spirit of Romans 14.15)?⁸

Third, the use of beverage alcohol is unwise and possibly sinful because the Bible forthrightly condemns drunkenness. In 1 Corinthians 6.10, we read that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God. And in 1 Corinthians 5.11, Paul says that Christians are “not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is . . . a drunkard.”⁹ Some, of course, will say that drunkenness is only a matter of degree, and there are a variety of legal, medical, and scientific definitions. But while it is true that each individual is impacted differently by the

⁸Of course, Lutherans and others would argue that moderate drinking falls in the realm of what is *adiaphora*, “indifferent things,” on which scripture places no clear pronouncement. The matter of drunkenness or intoxication, though, is much different, since the Bible condemns such. See too the fine response by J. Lawrence Burkholde, “The Bible Says Drunkenness Is A Sin (Galatians 5.21). But Is Occasional Social Drinking Okay for Christians?” Christian Bible Studies, Christianity Today International (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2010), online at: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/bible-answers/personalconcerns/alittlewineforthe soul.html> (accessed 3 October 2019).

⁹Compare Romans 13.13; Galatians 5.21; Ephesians 5.18; also Matthew 24.49; Luke 12.45; 21.34; Acts 2.15; 1 Corinthians 11.21; 1 Thessalonians 5.7; Revelation 17.2.

quantity and type of alcoholic beverage they imbibe, the reality is that, after the very first drink, the chemicals in any alcoholic beverage begin their negative action on the brain and the body.¹⁰

So the safest way to avoid becoming drunk and the only way to avoid becoming drunk is never to take the first drink.¹¹

Throughout this holiday season, Satan will lure you with a variety of temptations and among these will be the temptation to drink alcoholic beverages. To take the first drink is a dangerous step. While the prevalence of alcoholism in the United States is difficult to determine, since there is no official diagnosis of “alcoholism,” the fact remains that alcohol addiction or “alcohol abuse disorders” are serious problems in the country. About three-fourths of the adult population drink alcoholic beverages, and roughly six percent of these or about 12 million are alcoholics.¹² So you may think, “That will never happen to me! I can drink moderately and not overdo it.” But that was the thinking of many who today are alcoholics. No one who is an alcoholic today intended to become an alcoholic. And if a person does not believe that he or she is susceptible to alcoholism by drinking in moderation, he or she is the very person Satan will

¹⁰Dan Schimmel, “The Truth about What Alcohol Does to Your Body,” QuitAlcohol.com (Los Angeles, CA: QuitAlcohol.com, 2012), online at: <https://www.quitalcohol.com/the-truth-about-what-alcohol-does-to-your-body.html> (accessed 3 October 2019).

¹¹Reference to moderation in the use of wine from both Old and New Testaments often is used as a counterargument to the position of complete abstinence. But these occurrences should be interpreted in light of the modern mechanical processes for production of alcoholic beverages and the cultural dynamic in the United States that trends toward excess and intoxication.

¹²“Prevalence of Alcoholism in the United States,” VeryWellMind (New York, NY: Dotdash, Inc., 2018), online at: <http://www.verywellmind.com/prevalence-of-alcoholism-in-the-united-states-67876> (accessed 3 October 2019); “Statistics on Alcoholism,” Learn-About-Alcoholism.com (Dana Point, CA: California Rehab Campus, 2019), online at: <https://www.learn-about-alcoholism.com/statistics-on-alcoholics.html> (accessed 3 October 2019).

get. The apostle warns, “Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10.12).

In a pamphlet called “Alcoholism—A National Threat, A Personal Problem,” David Grubbs cites a personal letter he received from a former alcoholic, Clarence Cloud. Mr. Cloud thought that he would never fall to the temptation of strong drink, but he woefully found out otherwise. Let me read to you excerpts from his letter.

After attending college for two years, I chose sales as my profession and have been selling something ever since. I was always good at my job in sales and meeting people. But the time did come when I thought I had to drink a beer occasionally to be just one of the boys.

I liked what two or three beers did for me in my younger days. It gave me a false courage and made me feel really bigger than I actually was.

As time went on I continued to be even better in the sales profession and I also continued to improve on my consumption of alcohol. I took pride in bragging or boasting about drinking some of my buddies under the table. Isn't this really something for someone to brag about?

Then the time came when I knew I should stop drinking. I tried hard, very hard and nothing happened. By this time I actually couldn't quit drinking. My will power was completely gone and I was suffering from alcoholism in the worst way.

Hallucinations—I was having them often—like color TV years before it was invented. I understand why people from all walks of life commit suicide—they give up—they were never close to God in their life and when they go so far they have nothing left to hold on to.

I was fortunate—I had known God—God had not let me down—I had let God down. I had several preachers and godly men visit with me during this time but all they could do was tell me I was going to hell if I didn't change my ways. I knew this all the time and wished the sooner the better.

My doctor told me that if I didn't stop drinking I would soon die of alcoholism or would have to be placed in a mental institution due to having a wet brain. This I knew also.

Where does this leave a person to go? No help from God (I thought). No help from your doctor. The only out is self destruction, and if there happened to be a God maybe he would be merciful.

Later on in life, Clarence Cloud became a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, and his participation helped him recover from alcoholism. His letter, which reflects what millions of

others have experienced, speaks for itself as a testimony to the negative effects of alcohol consumption and addiction. Two passages from his letter, however, bring his heartaches a little closer to home, since Mr. Cloud attended the same Christian college that I attended. He writes, “Seems only a few short years since I sat in the same auditorium with my classmates at Freed-Hardeman. It was 1936 and 1937 to be exact, just 30 short years ago as I am now fifty years old. At that time I never tasted anything with alcoholic contents.” Cloud also remarked earlier in the letter about the time he had a visitor from the Alcoholics Anonymous group that he attended. He states, “This fellow had been sober several years in A.A. and didn’t have but a sixth grade education. What could he tell a fellow like me, who had two years at Freed-Hardeman studying the Bible about God, that I did not already know?” Here was a Christian man who attended a Christian college, and he became an alcoholic. Do not think that alcohol is a problem far removed from you. If you give it the chance, it will cause you to have the same agonies that Clarence Cloud experienced. But you may not be so fortunate. You may not recover!

If you yield to Satan’s temptation to drink, you may one day be numbered with the millions who day after day chant with dizzy heads the drunkard’s twenty-third psalm.

The bottle is my shepherd: I shall have want;
It maketh me to wallow in my own filthiness,
It leadeth me to ruin and destruction,
It wearies my soul.
It leadeth me in the paths of desperation and despair.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the horrors of death,
I cannot but fear because you are against me,
 your toxicants and strong spirits make me delirious.
You cause my family to hate me,
You anoint me with sorrow,
My cup is always full of your torment.
Surely doom and destruction shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the condemned forever.

The Bible says that those who get drunk on strong drink surely will dwell in the house of the condemned forever. In Galatians, chapter 5, Paul lists drunkenness among the works of the flesh and writes that “those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Because of alcohol, the gates of heaven will be barred to many on the day of judgment. Just as the poet said:

A bar to heaven, a door to hell—
 Whoever named it, named it well!
A bar to manliness and wealth,
 A door to want and broken health.
A bar to honor, pride and fame,
 A door to sin, and grief, and shame;
A bar to hope, and a bar to prayer,
 A door to darkness and despair.
A bar to honored, useful life,
 A door to brawling, senseless strife;
A bar to all that's true and brave,
 A door to every drunkard's grave.
A bar to joy that home imparts,
 A door to tears and aching hearts;
A bar to heaven, a door to hell—
 Whoever named it, named it well!

Paul writes in Ephesians 5.17-18, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.” The literal meaning here is—Don't begin to be softened by wine! Why? Because alcohol destroys a person internally, externally, and eternally. The believer in Jesus rather should be filled with or intoxicated with the Holy Spirit of God and thereby draw near to God by following after the fruit of the Spirit.

For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. [Galatians 5.22-25].

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