

# THE CHRISTIAN AND ALCOHOL

A CASE FOR TOTAL ABSTINENCE

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# 1. When wine slew Noah

***Genesis 9:20*** *And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:*

***Genesis 9:21*** *And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.*

Those who fear God and love the righteous heroes of the Bible are doubtless saddened to read about this sordid episode in the life of Noah. If truth be told, many Christians prefer to act as if this incident never occurred, or suppress it when remembered. How do we explain to our children that the great Noah, who overcame ridicule and ostracism at the hands of his doomed generation, was now himself overcome by the intoxicating effects of alcohol? Barely three chapters earlier, the Bible heaps tribute upon Noah:

***Genesis 6:9*** *These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.*

I am persuaded that the sin of Noah found its way into the pages of the Bible to warn the people of God about its devastating effects. The underlying message is clear: serving God and alcohol consumption are mutually exclusive; if a

man of the stature of Noah succumbed to the evil effects of alcohol, none of us stand a chance. It appears that this was the first time Noah consumed fermented wine; nothing in the Bible suggests that Noah was given to intoxication. Centuries later, when God invoked the names of three men who were paragons of piety, Noah was mentioned along with Daniel and Job (Ezekiel 14:14). All this suggests that Noah's unfortunate encounter with fermented wine was a one-off, anomalous occurrence. This should serve to accentuate the sin-inducing power of alcohol. In an otherwise illustrious spiritual life, alcohol blighted the testimony of Noah. Two grievous sins followed in the wake of Noah's inebriation:

***Genesis 9:21*** *And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.*

***Genesis 9:25*** *And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.*

When Ham discovered his father naked, it appears he derived sinful pleasure from publishing this news, rather than hide the shame of his own father. As readers, we find no cause for sympathizing with Ham's perversion, nevertheless, and this is vital, we cannot but infer that this travesty was preventable if only Noah had followed a policy of zero tolerance with regards to fermented wine. Had

Noah not been a “servant” to alcohol, there would have been no need to pronounce Ham a “servant” to his brothers. Note the effects of the wine on Noah himself - he basically blacked out. We can observe the inappropriateness of such a state when we remember that not long before the time of Noah, God made man to have “dominion” over all of creation (Genesis 1:26). Noah, in his drunken and naked stupor, was a caricature of the command to have dominion. At that moment, he was under the dominion of alcohol. Man has travelled to the moon, eradicated many horrendous diseases, domesticated and controlled ferocious animals, but, paradoxically, struggles to have dominion over alcohol.

We can be glad that this story is candidly shared in the Holy Bible. It is left to us to analyze and draw the only conclusion worth drawing from this: the Christian life is most compatible with one where alcohol consumption, even the tiniest amount, is not an option. It is not an option at all because most of us wouldn’t know when we have consumed enough to become intoxicated. This is precisely the lesson we must draw from Noah’s case.

This booklet is written with one purpose in mind: to make a biblical case for total abstinence from alcohol. There is no

other way to approach this subject. In every biblical case this booklet considers, our argument will be further cemented by a plethora of research-based studies which confirm the damage alcohol inflicts upon our societies.

For example, in an article entitled *Blood Alcohol Levels in Suicide Cases* (Hayward et.al., 1992), the researchers studied 515 consecutive suicides in Western Australia between 1 January 1986 and 31 December 1988. They found that 182 of the 515 subjects had some alcohol in their blood. The breakdown is as follows: in 56 cases the blood alcohol was between 0.001 and 0.049%, in 23 between 0.05 and 0.079% (moderate impairment), and in 103 it was 0.08% or greater (significant impairment). This amounts to a sobering (pardon the pun) 35.8% of the suicide subjects containing some alcohol in their bloods (no reading was available for 6 of the subjects which means the 182 were divided by a total of 509 subjects to obtain the 35.8%). The report concludes:

*...alcohol may be an important factor in the final act of suicide....alcohol consumption is best understood as in the first place a response to (or symptom of) mental health and psychosocial morbidity, and then, for some, as a potential modifier in the chain of decisions leading to the act of suicide (Hayward et al., 1992, p. 260).*



It is worth the while to study Table 1, below. Look at the figures for carbon monoxide poisoning, for instance. Of the n=181 subjects who committed suicide through this action, 89 had some blood alcohol levels ranging from 0.001 to 0.08 and above. Beginning at 0.029% blood alcohol level, an individual begins to experience euphoria and disinhibition (the motor, cognitive, instinctive, and emotional faculties are gradually undermined).

**Table 1: Table 1: Blood alcohol levels (BAL) by method of suicide, 1986-1988** (Hayward, L., Zubrick & S.R., Silburn, S, 1992).

Type of suicide	Blood alcohol levels (BAL) (%)				% of *BAL
	0.0	0.001-0.049	0.05-0.079	0.08 +	
Carbon monoxide poisoning	92	31	11	47	49.2
Firearms	53	7	1	25	38.4
Drug overdose	49	8	2	8	26.9
Hanging	74	3	5	16	24.5
Jumping	11	0	0	1	8.3
Other poison	5	2	0	1	37.5
Moving object	5	1	0	0	16.7
Drowning	9	1	2	1	30.8
Stabbing/cutting	4	1	0	1	33.3
Other	25	2	2	3	21.9

<b>Total</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>—</b>
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Over 30% of those who committed suicide through the use of firearms, other poison, stabbing/cutting and drowning also had blood alcohol levels ranging from 0.001-0.08%. To put this into perspective, an individual experiences an impairment of reasoning, depth perception, and peripheral vision between 0.06-0.09% blood alcohol levels. The blood alcohol content (BAC) is the means of determining intoxication in most parts of the world. This is essentially the percentage of a person's blood which is alcohol. For instance, a drink drive limit of BAC of 0.20 means that 0.20% (one twentieth of one percent) of a person's blood, by volume, is alcohol. Now, most countries in the world operate with a 0.05% limit.

We have seen in the research case from Australia, which has parallels with a number of studies carried out in the USA and other countries, that it only takes between 0.001-0.049 percent (see Table 1) of blood alcohol levels for individuals to contemplate suicide. We may never know how many fatal road accidents were the results of alcohol-induced suicides. From Table 1 we can observe that there is a strong correlation between higher blood alcohol levels

(0.08% and above) and higher frequencies of suicides in every type of suicide. Now just imagine that the USA, the UK, and New Zealand happen to have a drink-drive limit of 0.08%. This is nothing short of reckless. These otherwise advanced nations find themselves sharing this dubious distinction with countries like Belize, Botswana, Ghana, Guatemala, Jamaica, Papua New Guinea, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe, to name a few. Fortunately, some, like Scotland, are pushing for a reduction down from the current drink-driving limit of 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood (i.e. 0.08%) to 50mg will be brought forward later this year (BBC, 2012).

Returning to Noah, his sin of drunkenness is put into sharp relief given the fact that he had just escaped the judgment of God upon a universally and irrevocably depraved world. What must be underscored is the associative nature of alcohol; it always seems to afflict others in close proximity of the intoxicated. In Noah's case it was his sons who were impacted. Like a drone missile which aims to take out a terrorist often inflicts "collateral damage," alcohol vexes those around the consumer. With reference to those who commit suicide under the influence of alcohol, family and friends are left to grieve for the loss.

This demonstrates that there are no spectators in this issue: society as a whole is co-opted in the task of battling this scourge.

In the next chapter, we will consider why God forbade the Levites and priests from touching anything associated with fermented wine or strong drink in the Temple.

## 2. The alcohol-free Tabernacle

Evil habit first draws, then drags, and then drives.  
(Coleridge).

***Leviticus 10:9*** *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:*

Man is created in the image of God. One aspect of this is the ability to discern right from wrong and judge judiciously, since God is the righteous Judge of the whole earth (Genesis 18:25). It goes without saying that any individual who is mentally compromised or impaired through the act of imbibing alcohol cannot fulfil this vicarious role. Anything that distorts the judgement is proscribed by the Almighty. Take a bribe, for example. It clouds the judgment by prejudicing truth, which is why God declares:

***Amos 5:12*** *For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.*

The Tabernacle was the sanctuary which represented the presence of God on earth. Those who were ordained to serve in it were forbidden to drink wine and strong drink. Just as a soldier is constantly attentive to the voice of his commander, the priests and Levites were expected to go about the holy business of God fully alert and in possession of their mental and physical faculties. A drunken person cannot discern between the voice of God and that of man. The priest and Levites were charged with the task of teaching the congregation of Israel the commandments and ways of God. Needless to say, imbibing alcohol is counterproductive to this aim. Significantly, the injunction in Leviticus 10:9 followed hot on the heels of a dreadful event which transpired in Leviticus 10:1.

***Leviticus 10:1*** *And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not.*

***Leviticus 10:2*** *And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.*

I had long suspected that there was more than meets the eye with reference to God's summary judgment upon Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10. The brief account about

their sin does not seem commensurate with the gravity of the penalty they incurred, until I read this commentary from Matthew Henry (1662-1714):

*The familiarity they were admitted to bred contempt of the divine Majesty; and now that they were priests they thought they might do what they pleased. **There is reason to suspect that they were drunk when they did it**, because of the law which was given upon this occasion, v. 8. They had been feasting upon the peace-offerings, and the drink-offerings that attended them, and so their heads were light, or, at least, **their hearts were merry with wine**; they drank and forgot the law (Prov. 31:5) <sup>1</sup>(emphasis mine).*

Indeed, it does sound plausible that they were not sober. Why else would they offer “strange fire”? That alcohol is the culprit is further bolstered by the fatal consequences which followed. Thirdly, as previously mentioned, why would God talk about alcohol and intoxication with Aaron *after* the death of his sons? All the above seems to indicate that alcohol was the *agent provocateur*.

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<sup>1</sup> Blue Letter Bible. Matthew Henry Commentary Leviticus 10.[http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm\\_view.cfm?AuthorID=4&contentID=729&commInfo=5&topic=Leviticus&ar=Lev\\_10\\_1](http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=4&contentID=729&commInfo=5&topic=Leviticus&ar=Lev_10_1) Retrieved 6.07.12.

Drinking and serving God are a toxic mix. It provokes the wrath of God. In fact, we cannot fail to note the implacable hatred that God had for his drunken priests in that he forbade Aaron, their father, to even mourn for them. “And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled.” (Leviticus 10:6).

Now, let us not forget that we, born-again Christians (John 3:5), are the modern-day priests and Levites of God. We are the living tabernacles in which His Holy Spirit dwells. “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (II Corinthians 6:16). Furthermore, since we are filled with His Spirit, we are the Levites of the Temples of our bodies. The Bible is crystal clear with regards to drinking intoxicating drinks in this capacity as Spirit-filled Christians.

***Ephesians 5:18*** *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;*



We can either be drunk with the wine of the Holy Spirit or that of the vine tree, but cannot tarry at both sources. We can appreciate the prohibition against intoxication if we understand that wine seeks to supplant or replicate the effects of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, the 120 disciples were accused of being drunk: “Others mocking said, ‘These men are full of new wine.’” (Acts 2:13). In a sense, the mockers drew their conclusions from the physical and emotional expressions of the 120. They shook, jumped up and down, laughed and cried, as the Spirit filled them. The Pentecostals of Azusa Street were pejoratively called “The Holy Rollers”. I have prayed for some who rolled, ran around the church, and then passed out with a serene look on their faces.

Satan seeks to emulate the effects of the Holy Spirit. Without doubt he knew about God’s desire to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28). Although futile, he never passes up on an opportunity to attempt to frustrate the plan of God. So he works overtime to initiate new and ever-younger souls into the cult of drinking alcohol. The ancient Mycenaean Greeks (1500-1100 BC) even worshipped a god of wine called Dionysus or Bacchus in Rome. This licentious god was supposedly the patron of all non-

conformists and free-spirited individuals. He was followed around by a bunch of naked nymphs and satyrs, and in his drinking rituals, there were no inhibitions – an orgy of decadence was celebrated.

Thus we observe that drinking anything which induces intoxication provokes the wrath of God because, in addition to distorting the judgment of the priest/Christian, it also perversely exudes a quasi-religious quality – a pseudo spiritual trapping, if you will. The Reverend Canon Farrar, at a meeting sponsored by the National Temperance League in 1877, aptly describes the seductive power of alcohol.

*Well, now, what is the moral of these facts Surely it is that alcohol, whether you call it a poison or not, has something very peculiar in its nature: that there is about it a sweetness and seductiveness, a sort of serpentine spell of attraction, which gradually draws men on while they do not know it, and which at last they find themselves unable to resist (Thomson, et al., 1877).*

I have known individuals who drank because they felt alcohol would “liberate” them from what they perceived as their shy, reserved and awkward natural dispositions. Jesus Christ is the sole Liberator of the human race. Paul declares, “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” (II Corinthians 3:17). Furthermore,

whereas the infilling of the Holy Spirit leads to righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17), alcohol intoxication is accompanied by foolish-talking, promiscuity, a severe head-ache, and a myriad of other physical and psychological problems, besides the already mentioned contribution of alcohol to suicide.

For those who maintain that drinking in moderation is acceptable, I can only recommend that they consider and weigh up the evidence from the colossal damage inflicted upon our societies by what began as “moderate drinking”. We are never informed as to what precisely constitutes for moderate drinking. The scientific and medical communities have long known that genetic and ethnic factors, to name just two, have an impact on tolerance levels. About 45% of African-Americans apparently have a variation in a gene that regulates taste perception which makes them prone to alcoholism. For instance, in an article entitled *Ethnic Differences in Alcohol Sensitivity (1972)*, published in *Science*, Peter H. Wolff compared the effects of alcohol on a sample of Caucasians and subjects from Taiwan, Korea and Japan. He concludes:

*The results indicate that 83 percent of Mongoloid adults responded with a marked visible flush; and an increase of optical density greater than 5 mm (mean increase 34.3 mm; range 14 to 78 mm) whereas only 2 of the 34 Caucasoid adults (6 percent) showed any increase of optical density greater than 5 mm, and only 1 of these flushed visibly. Population differences in flushing response were statistically significant ( $P < .001$ ) (Wolff, 1972).*

The term statistically significant is akin to someone saying: “There’s only one chance in a thousand this could have happened by coincidence.” To arrive at a 0.001 (chi-square test) level of statistical significance, solid and convincing evidence must be furnished. So, if an African-American, Caucasian, and Japanese, who are of the same age and weight, sit down together and drink alcohol beverages, the effects could potentially be dissimilar in relation to a number of indices such as flushing, optical density, and pulse pressure. According to one report:

*By the 1980s investigators traced the reaction [i.e. of people from the Far East] to an enzyme involved in alcohol metabolism, aldehyde dehydrogenase, and eventually to the gene that encodes it, ALDH1 (Nurnberger, et al., 2007).*

What is sauce for the goose is not sauce for the gander in this instance. But, then again, lest our Caucasian friends

interpret this as a license to indulge in alcohol, the report goes on to say, “Alcoholism is genetically complex, meaning that multiple genes are likely to be involved, and their interactions with one another and with an individual's environment also have to be examined before a complete picture of the processes that can lead to the disorder is assembled.” (Nurnberger, et al., 2007). In other words, the factors that induce alcohol dependency are complex involving emotional, psychological, and environmental factors. No society has been spared its debilitating effects, regardless of what the genes say.

What should be the conclusion to all this, even from a secular viewpoint? Should it not be that everyone is potentially at risk from alcoholism and, ergo, the best deterrent should be a zero-tolerance policy? In light of the above facts gleaned from modern science, it comes as no surprise that God prohibited not only alcohol (strong drink), but every sort of non-alcoholic product associated with grapes for Nazarites – men who took a special vow of living consecrated lives to God:

***Numbers 6:2*** *Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall*

*separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord:*

**Numbers 6:3** *He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.*

**Numbers 6:4** *All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.*

Keep in mind that alcohol abuse was not a major problem in ancient times, yet, despite this, God commanded the Nazarites to abstain from anything derived from the vine tree. One reason for the low-strength of alcohol content in wine in ancient times was the inability to sufficiently ferment the wine anaerobically (preventing air or oxygen). This technical inadequacy can be put down to the poor quality of vessels and stoppers in those days. According to *The Wine Words of the Old Testament*, the alcohol of ancient times was estimated at being between 2% to 6% in strength.

**Table 2:** Types of alcoholic beverages with alcohol content (%).  
Source: World Health Organization, UN.

Types of alcoholic beverages		
Beverage	Source	Alcoholic content (%)
Brandy	Fruit juices	40-50

Whisky	Cereal grains	40-55
Rum	Molasses/sugarcane	40-55
Wines (Port, Sherry, champagnes)	Grapes (also other fruits)	10-22
Beer	Cereals	4-8

Civilization has gone (or regressed) from a maximum capacity of producing alcohol at 6% to an unbelievable 75-95% (the potent grain-sourced “Everclear”). This was due to the discovery of the process of distillation barely 1200 years after the New Testament was written (Masters, 1992, p. 21).

Surely, gauging from the severe proscription in Numbers 6, we can only conclude that God was dead-set against the so-called “moderate” or “social” drinking culture so prevalent today. The Book of Judges quite candidly records the many moral flaws of Samson who was a Nazarite. Certainly all his moral flaws would have been magnified several-fold had he been given to wine in addition. Wine would have done him in long before Delilah’s crafty fingers caressed his hair. How many otherwise morally weak men

or women have had their deaths postponed thanks to abstinence from alcohol?

A Dr. Richardson, speaking at the aforementioned National Temperance League in 1877, had this say in his opening remarks (the text is reproduced precisely with the response of the audience):

*You will find Mr. Walter [Member of Parliament] speaking on the subject of temperance at Newbury and quoting me to this effect - that I have said, "Alcohol is the devil in solution." (Laughter.) Now, ladies and gentlemen, I assure you I have never said so good a thing. (Cheers and laughter.) I have called alcohol a bona fide devil, but I never expressed so happy a thought as that alcohol is, what it is - the devil in solution (Thomson, et al., 1877, p. 9).*

Indeed, speaking of the “devil in solution,” one wonders why some alcoholic beverages are called “spirits”. Scholarly sources inform us that this comes from the distillation process in which any distilled beverage with at least 20% alcohol content, and no added sugar, is called spirit. Reflecting on Dr. Richardson’s designation of alcohol as the “devil in solution,” Canon Farrar, who followed him, stated:

*I am quite sure that we should not shrink from saying that it has a very great deal of bad spirits in reality, and that whether “alcohol” or*



*“Apollyon” be the true name for that multitude of fiends, they would all of them bear testimony with one mouth and exclaim – in the language of the demoniac of Gadara – “Our name is Legion, for we are many.” (Cheers.) (Thomson, et al., 1877, p. 17).*

Calling alcohol the “devil’s solution” and “Apollyon” (Greek name for the King of the devils found in Revelation 9:11), would certainly earn anyone the label “fanatic” today, as the likes of Dr. Richardson and Canon Farrar were called “ascetic” in their day. Those who fight a crusade against the “devil’s solution” will be accused of assuming to themselves a Pharisaic virtue. Reading the written texts of the speeches from that conference 135 years later, where the havoc wreaked by alcohol is amply described, one can hardly fail to note that the present circumstances have not changed one iota – in fact, our relative affluence coupled with the wonders of the modern distribution network have secured for us all a readily accessible supply.

Speaking out against moderate drinking, Dr. Richardson narrated a curious story. He was sitting beside the driver in an open carriage as they drove into Canterbury, where he spends his summer holidays. All of a sudden, the horse stopped outside an inn for no apparent reason. The driver

said that the horse was in the habit of doing so each time they passed the inn because they used to give him a pint of beer from that very same inn. This is ample testimony to the enslaving properties of alcohol. It induces powerful habits in any creature that succumbs to its power. It may sound fatuous but can you imagine any other non-alcoholic beverage that exerts such diabolical power over us? I have yet to hear of an individual whose tongue salivates at the sight of the milkman's van.

Quoting a Sir Wilfred Lawson, to argue his case for abstinence, Canon Farrar said, "The mitred heads of the whole of the episcopate gathered could not discover any cause for drunkenness except drinking." Had Britain woken up to heed the warnings of the likes of Canon Farrar and Dr. Richardson, we perhaps would have been spared the culture of "binge drinking" and no go zones in some areas of the cities which cost the tax-payer £21 billion annually (*The Independent*, 2012).

In conclusion, the judgment on Nadab and Abihu in the Tabernacle and the vow of the Nazarite serve to underscore the need for total abstinence in relation to alcohol. There is so much at stake with this most unreliable drink, and for the sake of the millions who are suffering today, that it should

be both a Christian and patriotic duty to abstain. I will let Dr. Richardson conclude this chapter in his eloquent style:

*When we look at a great river, we think not, perhaps, at the moment of the rivulet from which it came, and over which we in childhood may have leaped; but that great river sprang from the rivulet. When we look at our public-houses, from which the drunken men over whom we expend so much pity pour forth, we are apt to forget that those houses are but the outlets of the rivulets of the great stream of intemperance which had their origins in the million little centres we call the domestic shrines (Thomson, et al., 1877, pp. 9,10).*

### 3. Wine and the daughters of Lot

*God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good: but alcohol was not there” (W.J. Shrewsbury, 1810).*

The seventh commandment delivered to Moses states, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). For the purposes of this chapter, we shall include all unbiblical sexual relations e.g. fornication (illicit sex between the unmarried). My main argument shall revolve around the fact that alcohol consumption compromises one’s ability to adhere to the seventh commandment.

Now, it is perhaps appropriate to state at this juncture that although it is hoped, and I believe, this book will be of great benefit to non-Christians, it is predominantly Bible-affirming Christians who are assumed as the main audience. It is within the framework of the Bible and its pronouncements on this topic that the locus of the discussion occurs.

Perhaps a good place to situate this chapter is another sad episode involving wine and sin that blighted the legacy of

another illustrious man of God – Lot. Many are familiar with the story of Lot’s deliverance from Sodom and Gomorrah, described graphically in Genesis 18 & 19. Most sermons and Bible studies on the topic that I have heard or read for over twenty-five years focus mostly on the sin of homosexuality as the underpinning cause for divine judgment, but few take cognizance of the events that transpired in the aftermath of Lot’s deliverance from Sodom and Gomorrah.

**Genesis 19:34** *And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.*

**Genesis 19:35** *And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.*

**Genesis 19:36** *Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father.*

It assaults our moral integrity to read this account. What is more, many are appalled that such an account is narrated in the Holy Bible at all. Like the scandalous and disheartening account of Noah and fermented wine, discussed in chapter one, we find that the Bible faithfully and unapologetically

records another scandal, this time involving incest. In less than ten chapters, we are faced with another moral failing involving intoxication. Let us explore this story closer.

There are three points which I wish to consider: the enduring influence of Sodom and Gomorrah upon Lot's daughters, the question of Lot's complicity in the incestuous sin, and, the long-term consequence of this sin for the children of Abraham, the Israelites. Let there be no doubt: intoxication was the common denominator for the whole repugnant incident. It is imperative we understand the profound and uncontrollable effects that alcohol has on those who dare to flirt with it, including the people of God. Let me begin with the first point.

Undoubtedly, the daughters of Lot must have learned about the relationship between alcohol and sex in Sodom and Gomorrah. Much like the night-life of many of our modern cities, they perhaps quickly learned that alcohol facilitates sex. As sexual perversion was rampant in Sodom and Gomorrah, they must have seen alcohol often used as a catalyst bending the will of the reluctant or undecided. They knew that as long as their father was sober, he would never consent to their evil plans, but once his moral filter was

blurred and temporarily suspended through the agency of intoxication, they could do as they pleased with him.

This brief analysis amplifies the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. No wonder God was compelled to personally make a visit to Abraham with two angels and herald the imminent doom of these two cities.

***Genesis 18:20*** *And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;*

***Genesis 18:21*** *I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.*

God physically separated the two daughters of Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah after destroying the cities, but Sodom and Gomorrah were well and alive in the heart of Lot's daughters. They conspired to intoxicate their father because they feared childlessness. How poor was their faith compared to that of their famous relative, Abraham? Of Abraham Paul writes, "Who staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." (Romans 4:20, 21).

Secondly, there is the question of Lot's complicity. What is meant by this is the extent to which Lot was genuinely innocent of the entire incident. He is presented in the account as being detached from it all, as if oblivious to what transpired. I understand it is a very serious allegation to impugn Lot, but I wish to only zero in on the wine-drinking aspect. Why did Lot permit his sin-tainted daughters to push him to drink generous amounts of the wine when he fully well knew the intoxicating effects it induced? It is reasonable to acquit such a righteous man of the slightest suggestion of incest, but what about the drinking of fermented wine – not one night alone, but consecutively? Should he not have felt some shame after the first night upon discovering, as a minimum, that he was drunk the night before?

I find it hard to accept that a man whose righteousness and the mercy of God delivered from the cut-throat society of Sodom and Gomorrah succumbed so easily to incest. Reading between the lines, one suspects the text is inviting such a reading; namely, that Lot may have harbored a liberal attitude towards fermented wine. In contrast, the account on Noah seems to indicate a one-off, aberration, while that of Lot cannot be considered so because it was repeated the next day. When great men like Noah, Lot and David were



determined to sin, God did not intervene to prevent their sin, but allowed them to suffer the consequences. This seems to me to be the case with Lot, too.

The third point for us to consider is the long-term consequences of this shocking account in Genesis 19. We may never settle the issue of Lot's complicity, nevertheless, wine featured prominently in this episode which was to have unforeseen consequences for the promise of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember that Lot was accompanying Abraham, his uncle, on a mission to inherit the blessing of the Promised Land and children "as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore" (Genesis 22:17). Now, however, his daughters gave birth to Moab and Ammon, two ethnic groups who would be a thorn in the flesh of Israel for generations. The Psalmist, Asaph, for example, petitions God to deal with a confederation of nations who had sworn to destroy Israel. Among them we find Moab and Ammon.

***Psalm 83:4*** *They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.*

***Psalm 83:6*** *The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes;*

***Psalm 83:7 Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the  
Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre;***

Lot could not have foreseen all these incredible consequences when he surrendered to what must have seemed like an innocent pleasure – drinking some fermented wine. What if Lot was a teetotaler? No doubt his daughters would never have conjured up the idea of serving him wine, and none of the two formidable enemies of Israel would have seen the light of day. This is not the last time intoxication served to afflict and vex many domestic circumstances. The countless women battered by their drunken husbands, the increasing numbers of bankrupt individuals who have been done in by alcohol, and the humongous costs to the health sector, would all benefit hugely if alcohol was rejected. One speaker at a temperance meeting in 1810, W.J. Shrewsbury, a Wesleyan minister, captured some of the benefits of rejecting alcohol and rebuked the hypocrisy of the authorities of his day.

*It will bless man in his individual character. It will benefit him in all the relations of life. It will make a loving and sober husband, along with the saving influences of the Gospel of Christ, of which temperance is a part. It will help the economy of the frugal housewife, for alcoholic drinks are a double drain of the pocket, first in their original purchase, and then in the purchase of physic to heal the diseases they have caused: and it will*

*make quiet families, peaceable citizens, upright juries and judges. If British rulers were Christians, as they profess to be, and as they ought to be, they would make a bold stand at once, against this crying national sin, nor be guilty of the blood of the people any longer by licensing the sale of ardent spirits for the sake of revenue (Shrewsbury, 1810, pp. 35,36).*

Lest someone accuse me of basing my arguments on the Bible alone (although that should be sufficient) and recruiting some “antiquated” figures from temperance societies, let us turn briefly to what modern research is unveiling with regards to the troubled relationship between sex and alcohol. In a longitudinal study, begun in 1979, for example, researchers looked at linkages, if any, between sexual activity and alcohol/drug use among 12,200 American adolescents between the ages of 18-26. These adolescents were interviewed for many years to determine the linkage. In 1988, the report concludes:

*There is no doubt that young men and women who start using marijuana or consuming alcohol (or, in particular, begin doing both) at early ages are more likely than their abstaining counterparts to initiate sexual activity within a year (Mott and Haurin, 1988, p. 136).*

In other words, young adolescents who begin drinking alcohol and experimenting with drugs at an early age, also have an early sexual debut. Does this ring a bell? In the case of the daughters of Lot, it certainly does. From the account in Genesis 19, we get the impression that they were not new to imbibing fermented wine, as they seemed well-versed in its effects. Significantly, the same report found that those who began having sexual relations early seem to have begun drinking alcohol and other drugs not long after. This applied especially to girls.

*Conversely, those who engage in sexual activity at a given age certainly are more likely to use alcohol and, in particular, marijuana during the following year than are those who have not had intercourse. These linkages may be somewhat stronger for girls than for boys (Mott, F.L and Haurin, R.J, 1988, p. 136).*

It is like saying you can't have the one without the other. It comes as a "buy one get the other free whether you want it or not" deal. Those who break the seventh commandment find themselves soon embracing alcohol and other harmful substances, while those who begin with alcohol and drugs fall foul of the seventh commandment not long after. In the case of Lot's daughters, this nexus is manifestly clear. We cannot be sure from the biblical record which sin they first surrendered to, but it was not long

before they were peddling both sins for their own devious purposes.

Dr. Aric Sigman, in his book, *Alcohol Nation - How to Protect our Children from Today's Drinking Culture* (2011), cites results from a study published in the *International Journal of STD & Aids* (2007). Researchers had monitored the drinking patterns of patients at a typical STI clinic in a large city in the south of England.

*76 per cent of women had experienced unprotected sex as a result of drinking, and women who binged most heavily experienced significantly more unwanted pregnancies. A fifth of the women 'reported an unwanted pregnancy, with 28 per cent drinking beforehand' ( (Sigman, 2011, p. 105).*

Although the link between alcohol and sexually transmitted diseases is indisputable, Dr. Sigman questions why UK authorities ignore this connection. In another 11-year research done in Australia, results showed that, "Rates of alcohol consumption among secondary students aged fifteen to seventeen have increased markedly, as has the proportion of young people engaging in sex while under the influence of alcohol...and increased rates of sexually transmitted and infections (Sigman, 2011, pp. 105,106).

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Again, studies seem to confirm the fact that women are more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol than men. It takes half the time for a woman to become an alcoholic than it does for a man. Women show damage of the liver (cirrhosis), nerve and heart muscle much more rapidly than men. Furthermore, women who drink while pregnant hurt their unborn children causing foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. This is a non-genetic intellectual or cognitive disability and affects about 0.5 to 2 births per 1000, which is higher than Down's syndrome, affecting 1.1 births per thousand (Sigman, 2011, p. 116). Looking at these depressing statistics, if "girls just wanna have fun," they would be well-advised to avoid alcohol altogether.

Returning to Lot and his daughters, I wonder if God approached Abraham to intercede for the city, especially Lot and his family, because of the horrible consequences that would later bedevil his own descendants. Once we imbibe alcohol, the damage can be far-reaching. The daughters of Lot feared childlessness and gave wine to their father, but ended up giving birth to two ethnic groups who strove to obliterate the children of Abraham, and, by extension, the Promised Seed of Abraham – Jesus Christ.

***Galatians 3:16*** *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to*

*seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed,  
which is Christ.*

The “devil’s solution” may have momentarily conquered Noah and Lot and other stalwarts of the faith, but, thankfully, this enemy is no match for the one who conquered death and hell.

## 4. Wine and the Book of Proverbs

***Proverbs 31:6*** Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish

A proverb (Greek *proverbium*) is a distillation of the collective and accumulated commonsensical experience of a group, society, or nation, often expressed in the form of metaphorical statements. An example, relevant to our subject, is, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” We all engage in reinforcing old proverbs from time to time. Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), the founder of the essay format, was essentially calling for the inculcation of such a mindset in pupils when he said:

*He must sound every man's capacity. A herdsman, a mason, a passing stranger, he must draw upon them all and borrow from each according to his wares, for everything has some household use. Even other men's folly and weakness will be instructive to him. By noting each one's graces and manners, he will foster in himself a liking for good manners and a dislike for bad (de Montaigne, 1958, p. 61).*

Indeed, this is precisely what we find in the Book of Proverbs: moral lessons drawn from the good and the bad of the lives of people from all walks of life. Every virtuous



behavior is lauded while every vice is censored. Perhaps one can view the Book of Proverbs in the Bible as an “inspired” collection of lifelong observations of wise men, such as King Solomon. Solomon, you will recall, asked God to endow him miraculously with wisdom, so he could bring this wisdom to bear in his duties as king over God’s heritage. We are told that God gave him unprecedented wisdom:

***1Kings 3:12*** Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

Endowed with this wealth of divine wisdom, what does Solomon tell us about wine? We find that he did have much to say about this topic which, no doubt, must have been a vexing social issue in his day, too, gauging from his writings. Before we proceed, it is essential that we establish an important hermeneutic principle with regards to wine in the Bible. The word generally used for wine is *yayin* (Strong’s H3196) in Hebrew. What a careful study of this word, and many of the other variants used in the Bible, reveals is that the context determines whether intoxication is implied or not. Two contrasting examples are cited below:

***Proverbs 9:5*** Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.

***Proverbs 20:1*** Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

In Proverbs 9:5, wisdom calls out to the simple and invites him to drink of the wine (*yayin*) she has mingled. In this instance, wine cannot have a negative/intoxicating connotation, for wisdom can only promote the good and the wholesome. On the other hand, the same wine (*yayin*) mentioned pejoratively in Proverbs 20:1, can only be understood as fermented wine with all the negativity this entails. What this boils down to is summed up by the Reverend Shrewsbury who, even though he refers to another word for wine *tirosh* (Strong's H8492), ultimately extends the same argument for the whole discussion on wine:

*We proceed to shew, secondly, "That no approval, but frequent disapproval, of whatsoever intoxicates, is expressed in the Old Testament... Whether therefore the word must be taken in a good or ill sense, depends wholly on the scope and connection of the passage, and can never be determined simply by the word itself (Shrewsbury, 1810, pp. 11,12).*

With this caveat hopefully settled, let us look again at Proverbs 20:1:

***Proverbs 20:1*** *Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*

Significantly, the word for “mocker” in Hebrew is *lumts* and is often translated as “boastful,” “puffed up,” or “scornful.” Is this not a fitting description of the very process of making fermented wine? During the process of fermentation, yeast in the grape must (newly pressed grape juice which contains the skin, seed etc) interacts with the sugars present in the juice to produce ethanol (ethyl alcohol) and carbon dioxide as a by-product. During the fermentation process, there is, indeed, a “puffed up” appearance to the wine.

To Solomon, a wise person ought not to be deceived by wine, for wine is puffed up and a mocker. I have been blessed in that at the early age of 15, I embraced the Gospel and the concomitant understanding that alcohol is sinful. I must also add that my Muslim roots only reinforced this understanding (sadly, many church denominations accept moderate drinking). Nevertheless, I have had ample opportunity to see the “mocking” effects of alcohol upon

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the lives of many during my time as a cab driver in Oslo, Norway, especially during the weekend nights. I can never forget the many tipsy customers I drove home only to find that they had passed out under the influence of alcohol (how was I to know where they lived?), or were so unruly and incoherent that I was compelled to call the police. I have seen drunken women head home with total strangers. I once remember a woman reeking of alcohol who just asked me to drive around aimlessly in the city. All along she was talking about the meaninglessness of life and seemed very pessimistic. As a Christian, obviously, I countered her views using Scripture and the love of Christ. All of a sudden she broke down and revealed to me that, had she not met me, she most definitely would have committed suicide that night.

I remember another drunken man who sat in the car with a massive python snake coiled around his torso, which I did not know at the time because he wore a rather large leather jacket. At the first traffic light, he asked if I wanted to greet his friend “Lena”. I was puzzled because he was alone when he entered the cab, but I turned around to find myself staring into the eyes of a monstrous python. This lunatic actually expected me to pet the head of “Lena,” the python, but I was having none of that. I ran panic-stricken out of

the car and stopped a passing police car. Later the police raided his flat which had been converted into a tropical paradise for all kinds of creepy crawlers, including a little crocodile. It was the alcohol, he admitted, which compromised his judgment in deciding to “take the python out to town.” I could write an entire book about the mad encounters with the intoxicated during my time behind the wheel. But suffice it to say that my “close encounters with the drunken kind” have only served to reinforce my already rock-solid views on the impact of alcohol, some of which Solomon refers to in the verses below:

***Proverbs 23:29*** *Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?*

***Proverbs 23:30*** *They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.*

The media (especially the sleaze press) is culpable in promoting a culture which glamorizes alcohol by associating it with the celebrity culture. Perhaps because so many famous celebrities misuse alcohol and end up in rehab, the whole sordid culture has, paradoxically, been given a “cool” makeover. It seems to be part and parcel of celebrity life to go in and out of rehab. In 2006, Amy Winehouse, released a

hit song called “Rehab”. The lyrics speak of her bouts with depression brought on by her stormy relationship with her boyfriend, which leads her to drinking. Those close to her suggest she check into rehab, but she says “No, no, no.” One reason, apparently, was because her father thought she was fine. On 23 July, 2011, many were shocked to learn that she died of alcohol-poisoning. Wine, the “mockery,” struck again.

***Proverbs 23:31*** *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.*

***Proverbs 23:32*** *At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.*

***Proverbs 23:33*** *Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.*

The New Kings James Translation puts it this way, “Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly” (Proverbs 23:31).

Solomon is aware of the mesmerizing color and properties of wine. The text here reminds one of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. One could just as well have said, “Look not thou upon the forbidden fruit... .” What profit can be gained by looking at that which almost always brings woes and sorrows? Like Eve, we take a colossal risk in standing and admiring that which God has forbidden. All

the Devil had to do was persuade Eve to just *look* at the fruit.

**Genesis 3:6** *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

The most famous rendition of the saying, “All that glitters is not gold,” is found in Shakespeare’s the *Merchant of Venice* (1596). Portia, a rich lady, is bound by her deceased father’s wish that any suitor must select from three caskets made of gold, silver, and lead. The Prince of Morocco chooses the gold casket, arrogantly believing that he deserves Portia. Inside, a scroll reads, among others:

*All that glitters is not gold;  
Often have you heard that told:  
Many a man his life hath sold  
But my outside to behold:*

Indeed, how many men and women have sold their lives to alcohol? Take one study coming out of Finland, for example. In 1997, authors, Pia Mäkelä, Tapani Valkonen, and Tuija Martelin reported findings from a study published

in the *British Medical Journal* looking at the percentage of deaths related to alcohol in Finland and the socio-economic status of the victims. Two large data files based on the census records of deaths between 1987-90 and 1991-93 formed the source of the study. The results showed that 11 per cent of male deaths were alcohol related. What is even more shocking is that 4 per cent (almost half) of these alcohol-related deaths were in connection with violence and accidents, whereas only 5.4 percent of these same alcohol-related deaths were from disease (Mäkelä, et al., 1997).

Put differently, half of those whose deaths were on account of alcohol, died violently or in an accident of some sort. These are sobering facts, which we can be sure, are not limited to Finland alone. Finland ranks as number 24 in the list of countries with the highest consumption of alcohol per liter (World Health Organization). Now, one can imagine what the alcohol-related death statistics must be like for countries like Moldova (ranked 1), the Czech Republic (2) and Hungary (3). Curiously, 9 of the top ten countries were part of the former Soviet Union. Perhaps the legacy of alcohol is a consequence of their atheist philosophy. One must be very brave indeed to sit behind the wheel and drive in these countries.



Earlier, institutions would only calculate the number of years a person lost prematurely because of disease. Following the system first begun by Harvard University, global organizations, such as the World Health Organization, also take into account the number of years one lives in discomfort due to the debilitating effects of the disease. This is a more accurate measure of the true impact of a disease. This is often called DALY in public health measures:

$$DALY = YLL \text{ (Years of life lost)} + YLD \text{ (Years lived with disability)}$$

What the above means, for instance, is that looking only at the number of victims who die prematurely due the effects of a disease related to alcohol is not adequate. It doesn't paint the full picture. The DALY measure would include those who spend days, weeks, or even months in hospital getting detoxified. So a statement like the following, from the *British Medical Journal Online* ([www.bmj.com](http://www.bmj.com)) would be more accurate:

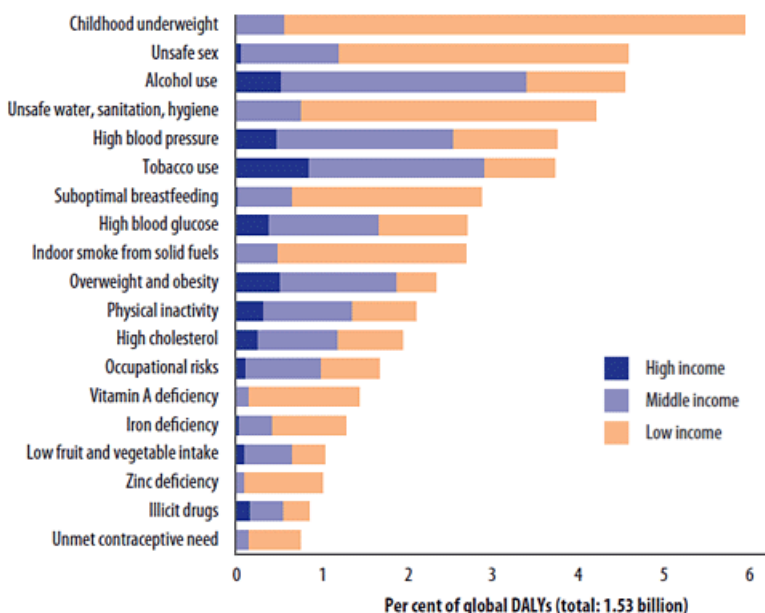
*On a worldwide basis, alcohol misuse is responsible for 1.8 million deaths and 58.3 million disability-adjusted life years.<sup>2</sup>*

Now with regards to the impact of alcohol-related diseases, it comes as no surprise that “Alcohol is the world’s third largest risk factor for disease burden; it is the leading risk factor in the Western Pacific and the Americas and the second largest in Europe.” (WHO fact sheet on alcohol, 2011)(See figure below).

**Figure.1: Global percentages of DALYs<sup>1</sup> attributed to 19 leading risk factors by income group. Source: Global Health Risks (2009).**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://bestpractice.bmj.com/best-practice/monograph/549/basics/epidemiology.html>



It is amazing, or more accurately, perverse, to consider that there are more people dying (no doubt in the richer parts of the world) of alcohol-related diseases than the millions affected by water-borne diseases in developing nations. There was a custom in the ancient world where criminals who faced certain death were offered strong intoxicating drinks to somewhat numb their senses. This was actually meant to be a gesture of “compassion”. We recall that our Lord Jesus Christ was offered gall mixed with vinegar which he refused (Matthew 27:34). It was this custom Solomon was alluding to:

***Proverbs 31:6*** Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.

***Proverbs 31:7*** Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

In a curious reversal of the custom, we are seeing thousands of perfectly healthy and free individuals trading their health and freedom for strong drink which first handicaps, and then kills. In fact, the BBC recently reported that due to the unprecedented rise in the number of people suffering from alcohol-related diseases, there will not be enough money to run the currently tax-subsided and completely free National Health Service in the future. Clearly, it cannot be fair that one segment of the population work hard, take care of their health, and sponsor the other intoxicated half.

## 5. Beware of drunkenness

**Luke 21:34** *And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.*

When the Lord Jesus Christ prophesied about the events leading up to His second advent, He included “surfeiting” and “drunkenness” among the major signs of the end. Most books and commentaries on Bible prophecy deliberate on the more dramatic prophecies, such as earthquakes, famine, pestilences, and armies surrounding Jerusalem, to name a few. Sermons and exhortations warning about the rampant state of “surfeiting” and “drunkenness,” which are endemic in our days, are few and far between.

The word “surfeiting,” (Greek *kraipalē*) is translated: “the giddiness and headache caused by drinking wine to excess”<sup>3</sup> In the last chapter, the report from the World Health Organization on alcohol-related diseases, also considered

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<sup>3</sup> Thayer’s Lexicon. Blue Letter Bible Online.  
<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G2897&t=KJV>

figures on absenteeism from the workplace due to headaches etc. In fact, it is quite common to hear individuals boast about the number of drinks they consumed and how sick they became after that. It appears, regrettably, that this culture of “surfeiting” and “drunkenness” has found its way into the higher echelons of power, such as elected representatives in the UK, for example. In an article from the *Telegraph Online* (11 July, 2010), with the headline, *Tory MP ‘too drunk to vote in Commons debate,’* we are told:

*A Tory MP was so drunk during a late night debate about the Budget in the Commons that he was unable to vote, it has emerged. Mark Reckless was one of a number of MPs accused of being “well-refreshed” and “convivial” during the late night sitting which finished at 2.48am on Wednesday. The 39-year-old new MP for Rochester and Strood had been drinking alongside scores of MPs on the Commons Terrace and was not the only one said to be worse for wear (Gammell, 2010).*

As the report states, the aptly named Mr Reckless was not the only drunk Member of Parliament among those voting on matters of national interest. Another MP, Sheryll Murray, was so drunk that she did not even remember being under the influence of alcohol when she was confronted. Is it any wonder, given the moral failure of the people who are

supposed to be examples and mentors for our children, that young people are confused? The summer riots, where feral children, teenagers, and young adults burnt and looted in a frenzy, was a harbinger of worse to come. The American writer, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), who inspired the likes of Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, and Martin Luther King with his ideas on civil disobedience, once stated:

*I have lived some thirty years on this planet, and have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors...If I have any experience which I think valuable, I am sure to reflect that this my Mentors said nothing about (Thoreau, 2005, p. 8).*

In the same extract from Thoreau's *Walden*, we have the famous saying, "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth." I can't speak for Thoreau's generation in America and his anarchist inclinations is a moot point, but with regards to our generation's "seniors" and "Mentors", especially in the West, not only have many abdicated their responsibility to the younger ones, but seem to be actively hastening their demise.

It is significant that the Lord Jesus mentioned "drunkenness" and "surfeiting" in the same breath as "cares of this life". As it is, we live in arguably the most stressful

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time in human history, where people are running to and fro and knowledge has increased by leaps and bounds (Daniel 12:4). Contrary to popular lore, alcohol will not ease this stress, but compound it.

While on the subject of leaders and alcohol, it has been shown earlier that God has set the bar much higher for His ministers. We remember the swift judgment on Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) and the Nazarite vow (Numbers 6). Another clear-cut example is that of John the Baptist:

***Luke 1:15*** *For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*

Being “great in the sight of the Lord” is linked with drinking “neither wine nor strong drink”. Ultimately, as professing Christians, our main objective is to hear the good Lord say, “Well done thou good and faithful servant...” (Matthew 25:21). Greatness, then, as God sees it, is inextricably connected to abstinence from alcohol. Note also the fact that John was to be “filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.” As previously discussed, Temples of stone and flesh were designated as dry, alcohol-free premises. I have often stated that life is



complicated enough, and brings with a host of problems, without the need to add alcohol into the equation.

Returning to Luke 21:34, we need to pay attention to the fact that the Lord was speaking to Christians: *And take heed to yourselves...* We are obliged, then, to conclude that the only possible way we can fulfill the Lord's admonition is through complete abstinence from alcoholic beverages. It is fatuous to put forward the oft-heard argument that drinking in moderation is fine – or the ubiquitous slogan accompanying alcohol advertisements – “Drink responsibly.” To take one example, many admire the so-called “responsible,” “continental-approach” of the French towards alcohol. This has been shown time and again to be a myth. The number of people dying of cirrhosis of the liver in France is double that of the UK. Furthermore:

*Even in 2003, a seminal study published in the European Addiction Research said that “Alcohol is the drug that gives rise to the greatest cost in France” – more than all other drugs combined and tobacco too (Sigman, 2011, p. 136).*

The logic behind total abstinence is simple: only those who are given to drinking so-called “moderate” amounts risk becoming drunk. It doesn't take a genius to figure out

that abstinence is the only option for anyone seriously considering avoiding drunkenness – a biblical command. There are some things of eternal value, and we should be willing to pay any price to obtain them. One such thing is heaven. Drunkenness, according to the Apostle Paul, will certainly shut the door of heaven in our face:

***Galatians 5:21*** *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.*

Although no fan of the scandalous and bizarre world of celebrity culture, I recently came across a website (the aptly named *Glamour Magazine*) which listed famous personalities who do not drink<sup>4</sup>, among whom were David Beckham and Jada Pinkett Smith. The paradox was not lost on me: keep in mind that this is an industry which peddles sensationalism to make money and thrive. Drinking is so mainstream and de rigueur among celebrities, that the “shocking” behaviour, as it were, of these teetotalers was newsworthy. How could they be celebrities and not drink? Curiously, each abstainer was interviewed as if to drive

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<sup>4</sup> Teetotal Stars. <http://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/celebrity/celebrity-galleries/2011/01/teetotal-celebrities>

home the point that their behaviour was abnormal and they had some explaining to do. Have you ever heard or seen a celebrity having to justify drinking?

Interestingly, a number of these teetotaling celebrities cited the fact that their drinking habits got out of control.

*Will Smith's wife, the gorgeous Jada Pinkett Smith, hasn't touched alcohol for eight years after fearing her drinking habits would get out of control. "I found myself drinking two bottles of wine on the couch and I said, 'Jada, I think we've got a problem here.' " she revealed. "From that day on I went cold turkey; I haven't had a drink in eight years."*

Another celebrity, Kelly Osbourne, more famous for being the daughter of the hell-raising rock star, Ozzie Osbourne, said:

*I don't drink at all. Even a glass of wine at dinner would probably mean me going home, getting (obscenities removed) ...(drunk) and then being on drugs and doing something stupid that I have to spend the next three months apologizing*

So much for “moderate drinking.” What we observe is that some celebrities, a category not known for their moderation, respect the overpowering influence of alcohol

and practice total abstention. Good on them and the many vulnerable children who follow their every move.

Allow me to address young Christians briefly. Youth and adolescence is a time of change and transition. Soon the carefree days will give way to adulthood and responsibility. This brings some challenges with it. Some may be fortunate enough to have their parents watching every step and ensuring as smooth a transition as possible, while others will be left to negotiate every turn more or less alone. Either way, we can confidently declare to you that the best way to meet the challenges of the future is with the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ guiding your way as a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path.

***Psalm 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,  
and a light unto my path.***

The man who uttered these words was a young boy, David. These words give us a window into the heart and mind of David. It was this desire and commitment to the Word of the Lord which brought incredible success to David, even placing him on the throne of Israel. Young people, God's desire is to bless you and give you a good future.

***Jeremiah 29:11*** *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*

I am glad that the Bible mentions a number of young role models for you to emulate. I understand that most of your friends are immersed in a celebrity-fixated culture, but look to the Word of God and you will find plenty of role models. I grew up, before I gave my life to the Lord, with “icons” like Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston, but they died horrible deaths addicted to alcohol and drugs. How did Joseph respond to sexual impurity, for example? He fled the scene of temptation.

***Genesis 39:12*** *And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.*

What about Daniel and the three Hebrew children? Rather than eat the food offered to idols, they made a pact with the chief of eunuchs to avoid this food, and suffered no adverse consequences. Sometime back, I drove from London to Newcastle. I had never been to Newcastle; in fact, I had never travelled beyond Milton Keynes which is about an hour north of London. I just plotted the address into the navigation system and off we went. After about 5 hours, the

satellite navigation device brought me straight to the address with the heartening words, “You have arrived at destination.” Young people, you are on a journey – the journey of life. You don’t know what the future holds for you, but the Bible promises us that God is the most reliable guide we can ever hope to have. The Bible is like the satellite that beams back information about every potential obstacle ahead:

***Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.***

***Proverbs 3:6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.***

I would like to remind young people that youth passes by very quickly. I still remember vividly the time I was 18 years old. I am now over twice that age, and still wonder where all those years just vanished. I am thankful to the Lord that I knew Him and loved Him at that tender age. The foundation one lays early on often continues into adulthood and old age. When I was 19, I remember a particular incident which could have ended disastrously, but the fear of the Lord protected me, despite my naiveté. I was attending language classes and the teacher invited me to eat with her at home. When I arrived she was very eager for me to drink some wine. Needless to say, my strong Christian

principles kicked in and I refused despite her persistent, almost insistent tone. She seemed disappointed, but only later did I realize that she intended for me to get drunk so that we could commit fornication. I was so naive that I didn't think she was capable of trying to corrupt a teenager.

***Proverbs 14:27*** *The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*

Imagine if I had succumbed to the temptation and drunk from the fountain of sin. Not only would I deeply hurt my relationship with the Lord, but I might also have compromised my standards and taken up drinking. This is an important subject for youth, especially since we are surrounded by a culture which believes that drinking is normal and even desirable. I know that as you get older (and even now) you will find that only a minority share our views on abstinence. Certainly, you will find that this can, at times, become a heavy cross to bear as some people will call you narrow-minded or fanatical (ascetic was in vogue earlier). Take refuge in the Word of God which will see you through. The apostle Peter adumbrated such a scenario.

***2 Peter 2:7*** *And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:*

**2 Peter 2:8** *For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.*

**2 Peter 2:9** *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:*



## 6. Alcohol and the mind

**Mark 12:30** *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all **thy mind**, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.*

All our rational and mental faculties are expected to engage in the task of loving the one true God. According to Jesus, the one God manifested in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16), this is part and parcel of the first commandment. The human mind is an incredible gift from God. From the invention of the wheel in ancient Sumeria to the development of HTML in 1990 by Tim Berners-Lee, which ushered in the age of the internet (what former Vice-President, Al Gore dubbed “the information superhighway”), the potential of the human brain is at once awe-inspiring and frightening.

This Janus-faced characteristic of our minds is evident in the fact that while the world celebrated Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity, his theory was also instrumental in the invention of the atomic bomb, under the supervision of J. Robert Oppenheimer and scientists of the Manhattan

Project. What a brief survey of the history of the world demonstrates is that, left to its own devices, the human mind, because of the nature of sin, makes selfish choices which endanger us all. The Enlightenment philosophers believed that man must only be guided by his rational mind; all religious and superstitious ideas must be expunged. Now, however, we live in the age of postmodernism where many, disillusioned by the promises of science (positivism), are exploring new avenues.

At any rate, what we can all agree about is that imbibing alcohol compromises the mind. Not only does it make it impossible to obey the command of Jesus in Mark 12:30, but, even for unbelievers, it undermines the quest for excellence. Studies are now reporting that teenagers who only binge drink (about four or five drinks) just *once a month*, can suffer irreparable cognitive impairment; their prefrontal cortex (part of the brain responsible for emotional and impulse control) is found to be smaller than the average, and remains so at the age of 21 (Sigman, 2011, p. 85).

Believers and non-believers share the common belief that doing well in school and further education is desirable and necessary. As our globalized world gets more and more

complex, many go on to higher education beyond high school to land good jobs. Needless to say, alcohol is one drug (not the only one) which has shattered many an aspiration.

“White matter” in the brain refers to parts of the brain which appear white due to the protective coating of fat. The main function of white matter is the coordination and relaying of information and affects a range of cognitive performances such as reading. Studies have found that teenagers who use alcohol even sparingly – four to five drinks a month – destroy brain cells in the white matter. In one study, a group of 12-14 year olds were assessed on various performance tests. Sometime later, some of the students began to drink. The whole group was assessed again and the results compared. Those who drank had poorer results compared to those who abstained from alcohol. The conclusion?

*The lead researcher spelled out the practical implications for parents of teenage pupils who were hoping to get their children into good universities. “The magnitude of the difference is 10 per cent. I like to think of it as the difference between an A and B” ...The study concluded that this type of moderate drinking during adolescence*

*“may adversely influence neuro-cognitive functioning” (Sigman, 2011, pp. 86,87).*

One reason we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our mind has to do with the obvious fact that, without a sober consideration of the works and Word of God, we cannot really appreciate, submit, and love Him. Considering the greatness of God requires attentiveness and concentration. Also, I will hasten to add that this cannot be a voluntary exercise, because the identity and majesty of God is of such an exalted nature that ignoring Him is a most grievous sin. Says God Himself, “Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth (Psalm 46:10).

Obviously, a mind under the influence of alcohol cannot “be still.” On the contrary, places where alcohol is served, such as nightclubs, tend to be boisterous. Just think of all the times the police have been called to calm down parties at the neighbors next-door. Without making it a doctrine, a case can be made to the effect that walking with God requires a certain tranquility of mind and spirit. Moses at the burning bush, Isaac meditating in the field, Elijah by the brook Cherith, Ezekiel beside the river Chebar, the Lord walking with the apostles besides the Sea of Galilee, all

evoke a sense of serenity in natural settings. In fact, with regards to Elijah, the Bible tells us:

***1Kings 19:12*** *And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.*

***1Kings 19:13*** *And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?*

It was not in the dramatic earthquake which tore apart the rocks, nor the fire, but in the “still small voice” the Lord was found. Think about the average employee today. He wakes up and swallows down his breakfast (if he eats at all) before driving straight into the usual morning traffic rush. Next, he most probably tunes in to some radio talk show station or listens to music. When he arrives, the next 8-10 hours are spent buried into the day’s work. He is caught up again in the traffic jam on the way home. Having arrived home, there is little time for family matters before he retires, only to repeat this pattern the next day and most of his life.

Curiously, it is often during the relatively small amount of free time during the weekends that our average employee

imbibes alcohol and becomes drunk? It has always befuddled my mind to hear co-workers, while still sober, declare that they intend to go out and get drunk in the weekend. I can only conclude that they either plan to do something which their consciences would not permit while sober, or they are hiding some troubling emotional/psychological impairment which must be drowned out in alcohol.

Many in our modern restless world are missing out on the “still small voice” of God. Is alcohol actually the chosen drug to stifle the “still small voice of God” seeking their attention? For generations, Sunday used to be the day people would go to church and remember the Lord. In fact, this was the purpose for having a free Sunday. Today, however, wake up early on a Sunday in one of our western cities and you will observe the odd specter of our eerily quiet streets because revelers are sleeping off their drunken stupor.

The Holy Spirit does not override the mind or the understanding, but works in conjunction with it. Christians must appreciate the linkage between the two. Contrary to what some churches may propound, the Holy Spirit does not expect us to suspend our mental and intellectual

faculties when praying and worshipping. We are not surprised that it was the church of Corinth in the New Testament which struggled with this truth. They failed to strike the right balance between praying in the spirit and praying with the understanding. They lived in a culture which apotheosized reason. Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the stoics, to name a few, stressed the importance of reason. Paul, who was familiar with Greek culture and learning, corrected them:

***1Corinthians 14:15*** *What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

Thus, the importance of our mind or understanding (Greek *nous*) is critical to the process of prayer and communication with God. The two are not to be compartmentalized, but united in prayer. Alcohol, then, threatens this collaboration. As the studies mentioned clearly demonstrate, alcohol actually attacks the very physiology of our brain and undermines our rational faculty. We all know the terrible effects of mind-altering drugs. Many scientists now consider alcohol to be more dangerous than class A drugs (heroin, cocaine, ecstasy, crystal meth, among others). Jean Paul Sartre, the famous French

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existential philosopher, who took copious amounts of alcohol, drugs and hallucinogens, believed that a lobster was chasing him. He lived in an “open relationship” with feminist Simone de Beauvoir, one in which they shared their love lives with other partners.

This chapter considers the impact of alcohol on the mind in light of Scripture. Consider the long-term effects of alcohol on our mental well-being. A study published in 2001 found that there is a link between aging, alcohol, and dementia (a set of cognitive disorders affecting memory, attention, language and problem-solving. The researchers concluded:

*We also found that those diagnosed with definite and questionable alcohol abuse had more often been diagnosed with dementia. A recent review on alcohol-induced dementia suggests heavy alcohol use as a contributing factor (and thus a close correlate) in 21% to 24% of cases, and a recent study relating alcohol consumption to cognitive performance and daily function found increasing levels of drinking to be significantly associated with a decrease in predicted log cognitive score (Thomas and Rockwood, 2001, p. 418).*

That alcohol is linked with dementia, a disease which afflicts many elderly people should be cause enough for drinkers to quit alcohol. We live at a time when, due to



advances in medical science, the life span of many, especially in the West, has soared. Now, if many more people are going to live longer, should we not be concerned about the quality of our lives during those sunset years? For those who live to a ripe old age, God desires them to be fruitful, something which cannot happen without having a sound mind. For the promise below to come to fruition, we must refrain from alcohol.

***Psalm 92:13*** *Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.*

***Psalm 92:14*** *They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;*

In conclusion we affirm that in order for an individual to fulfil the commandment to love God with all his/her mind, alcohol will have to be renounced. The evidence linking alcohol to cognitive impairments, such as weaker memories, poorer performance test results, and even dementia, calls for a zero tolerance policy towards alcohol. It has also been argued that prayer and worship can only be rewarding when a healthy mind is combined with the spirit in communicating with God. A giant of the Christian faith, and a man with a powerful intellect, the Apostle Paul, shall have the last word on how to make suitable use of our minds:

***Philippians 4:8*** Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **think** on these things.

## 7. Abstain from the appearance of sin

*When you have made another sin in his heart, how can you be innocent? Tell me, whom does this world condemn? Whom do judges punish? Those who drink poison or those who prepare it and administer the fatal potion? You have prepared the abominable cup, you have given the death dealing drink, and you are more criminal than are those who poison the body; you murder not the body but the soul. And it is not to enemies you do this, nor are you urged on by any imaginary necessity, nor provoked by injury, but out of foolish vanity and pride (John Chrysostom).*

The quote above is attributed to the fourth century Church Father, John Chrysostom (He was called *chrysostomos* in Greek which means “Golden-mouthed”). Women who dress immodestly and seduce men are just as guilty as their victims, he argued. This element of culpability can be extended to alcohol also.

In this section, we will consider the responsibility of a Christian towards his fellow-Christians and non-Christians in relation to alcohol. Our guiding principle, as always in such cases, is the biblical injunction, “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (I Thessalonians 5:22). I trust by now

that we are more than convinced that alcohol is an evil. We cannot beat around the bush on this all-important issue. As Christians it will not do to concede quietly that the problem of alcohol is so out of control that we cannot hope to do anything about it. We cannot succumb to the all-pervasive attitude which says, "We live in a free world. What others do is not my responsibility." On the contrary, we are bound to promoting the welfare of every individual and the collective as a whole, because the "Golden Law" declares, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39). This sentiment is well-stated in John Donne's poem:

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

Indeed, "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind." How can we be untouched when 2.5 million deaths occurred last year due to the harmful effects of alcohol, according to the World Health Organisation? Referring to this WHO report, *The Cambridge Medicine Journal* states, "Alcohol consumption is now the leading

risk factor for death in men aged 15-59 years old” (Sweeney, 2011). The report went on to state:

- Nearly 4% of all deaths are related to alcohol. Most alcohol-related deaths are caused by alcohol result from injuries, cancer, cardiovascular diseases and liver cirrhosis.
- Globally, 6.2% of all male deaths are related to alcohol, compared to 1.1% of female deaths. One-in-five men in the Russian Federation and neighbouring countries die due to alcohol-related causes.
- Globally, 320 000 young people aged 15-29 years die annually, from alcohol-related causes, resulting in 9% of all deaths in that age group. (World Health Organization, 2011).

In biblical terms, we are talking about our responsibility for each other and the interdependence of the human condition, often encapsulated in the phrase, “My brother’s keeper.” Cain, having killed his brother, now takes offense at God’s question, “And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? (Genesis 4:9). Running away or hiding

away from our responsibility to our brothers (all humans) will not do. Let us see how this applies in the matter of alcohol.

***Habakuk 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!*

***Habakuk 2:16*** *Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory.*

Spurred on by the Scriptures above, let all Christians resolve never to share, encourage, or facilitate the use of alcohol. I remember back in 1993, when as an employee of a certain embassy in Norway, I was given a wrapped gift as a token of the ambassador's appreciation. Upon opening it in my office, I was taken aback to discover a Johnny Walker whiskey bottle. One of my colleagues, seeing the bottle and aware that I was a teetotaler, asked if he could have it. Habakuk 2:16 & 17 began flashing in my mind. I refused to let him have it, without giving him any reason. That evening I went to the basement of the embassy and poured out the drink into a toilet commode which was no longer in use. Unfortunately, the flush did not work and so the entire embassy building reeked of alcohol for a few days.

Thankfully, no one asked me about the smell, although I did nervously observe two other senior employees sampling the air with their perplexed nostrils twitching away.

Habakuk knows that alcohol goes hand in hand with sexual immorality. Nothing has changed today. Actually, as mentioned earlier, alcohol has become even more potent in our day, which can only mean that the kind of sins the prophet warns against have multiplied and intensified many fold.

On the subject of alcohol acting as a catalyst for sin, we already have looked at the example of Noah and Ham. Some Bible commentators believe that Ham's sin was of a perverse nature; that he actually deceived his father with fermented wine in order to mock his nakedness. This may be reading too much into the account. Others, such as Matthew Henry write, "Perhaps Ham had sometimes been himself drunk, and reproved for it by his good father, whom he was therefore pleased to see thus overcome." At any rate, alcohol led to the nakedness that Habakuk condemns. The same Matthew Henry prudently observes that whereas Adam and Eve hid themselves after eating the

fruit of the tree, alcohol would not allow Noah the decency to hide his shame.

I shudder to think of the perverse joy of sinners at the sight of a drunken Christian; they certainly will be in no hurry to cover our shame, if God forbid, we are slain by alcohol. So, unlike other sins, drunkenness punishes us more severely in that it doesn't accord us the mercy of at least showing a modicum of remorse in the immediate aftermath of the sin. Rather, just as a cat perversely plays with a helpless mouse for fun (a fact which bothered Charles Darwin), alcohol numbs the senses, renders us helpless objects of buffoonery, and only later, leaves us to take inventory of our shame. Solomon hit the nail on the head when he wrote:

***Proverbs 20:1*** *Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*

What happens, though, when Christians are the ones who drink or are seen with alcoholic beverages? Some time back, I was called to the prestigious University of Cambridge, UK, for an interview for a PhD position. Although successful, and I was offered a position, I was asked to start from scratch, something which I turned down because I already had a year and a half under my belt. But



one of the lasting impressions from that encounter was an invitation to a restaurant where nearly the whole group ordered alcoholic beverages. Now, normally this should not raise any eyebrows as drinking is universal. But, just prior to the meal at the restaurant, I enjoyed a wonderful Bible meeting session with these very same Christians. Being a teetotaler, I ordered orange juice. I am sure they discerned my sense of discomfort.

These were some of the finest minds in the world, and given their commitment to the Christian faith, I was all the more honoured to be in their company. But, admittedly, the sight of individuals caressing their wine and martini glasses, who only a little while ago held the Bible and prayed, left me “shaken and stirred”. I regret that the opportunity to discuss what I saw as a discrepancy did not arise and thus I am left to simulate or hypothesize a possible reason for their behaviour. Perhaps a good place to begin is a Scripture which Christians who drink look to for validation:

***Deuteronomy 14:26*** *And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,*

In his book, *Should Christians Drink: The Case for Total Abstinence* (1992), the aforementioned Dr Peter Masters, who pastors the Metropolitan Tabernacle made famous by Charles Spurgeon, gives an excellent response to the argument drawn from Deuteronomy 14:26. I do heartily recommend his book which has enriched my own research and preparations in writing this booklet. To begin with, Masters acknowledges that wine was drunk in the Old Testament, but that does not give anyone carte blanche to drink today. Simply stated, his argument revolves around the fact that some of the biblical commandments in the Old Testament reflected the circumstances of the time: they were *concessions* not permanent categories set in stone.

Masters points to four examples that have changed over time in the Bible: war, slavery, dancing and divorce. Yes, indeed, God did sanction war, or what is called a “just war,” to borrow from Augustine, but the weapons of Bible days are insignificant compared with the nuclear weapons of our day. This is what Masters means by *activities may change categories*.

*Working from the Old Testament we could argue that because the ancient Israelites were commanded to use weapons, there is no such thing as an evil weapon. But human weaponry has*

*changed radically since those days (Masters, 1992, p. 13).*

Because man's inherent evil predilections constantly evolve, new and more perilous inventions are the result. Slavery was permitted to actually prevent the bankrupted Jewish brother from a life of total destitution and certain death through starvation. The commandment regulating slavery was intended as an adequate solution for a unique problem at the time. It was fit for purpose within the framework of the socioeconomic circumstances of the Israelites at the time. However, the commandment was never intended to remain immutable because human society is dynamic and in a state of constant flux. Consider again how absurd it would be for someone today to insist on practicing slavery because it was sanctioned in the Old Testament.

Think about the patriarchs and their conjugal relations. Beginning with monogamy, men gradually began practicing polygamy, with Abraham, David, and Solomon, outdoing their contemporaries. Some, in reading the verse below, may be forgiven for jumping to the conclusion that the God of the Bible sanctions polygamy:

**2 Samuel 12:8** *And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.*

What is required is a sound and thorough knowledge of the Word of God. Isaiah 34:16 challenges us to search from the book of the Lord and read; every Scripture will have a partner (mate). Those who search the Bible know that God never favoured polygamy from the beginning, as the verses below, which refer to a future Israelite king, indicate.

**Deuteronomy 17:16** *But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.*

**Deuteronomy 17:17** *Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.*

What all this proves is that there were many commands violated by even the great leaders of the Bible which God tolerated. Toleration is not synonymous with approval. The same can be said of alcohol. God may have tolerated this (clearly, though, not for the priests in the Tabernacle), but, like war, slavery, and polygamy, it would be morally repugnant to approve drinking alcohol given the devastation

it causes in our contemporary world. Remember it was only in the medieval period that new distillation techniques produced shockingly higher alcohol (an Arabian word) content. It is a curious paradox that we get the word “alcohol” from the Muslim Arabs of the medieval era who themselves were teetotalers.

So, returning to whether Christians can drink in moderation or not, Masters puts it well:

*The Christian abstainer’s conviction is that alcoholic beverages have moved from the category of beneficial in Old Testament times, to the category of grossly harmful and evil in later centuries. Without any doubt the development of the liquor industry has unleashed a massive and cruel tidal wave of human tragedy and misery across the world. It has wrecked lives, homes, families, careers, even entire ethnic groups, causing more harm and heartache in human society than virtually anything else, with the possible exception of war...Just as we do with war, slavery and dancing, to mention only a few examples, we have to ask, Has wine changed? Has the wine industry changed? Has the use of wine changed Have the dangers changed? (Masters, 1992, p. 16).*

I can only hope we respond in the affirmative and reject alcohol. This is commensurate with our roles as our

“brother’s keeper”. Paul declares, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (I Corinthians 10:23). And, again:

***Romans 14:15*** *But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.*

# Conclusion

This booklet has briefly considered the very relevant subject of the Christian's relation to alcohol. Alcohol has been weighed in the balance of the Word of God and found wanting. The handwriting has long been on the wall for alcohol. Interestingly, this saying which is frequently used to signify that an imminent danger is now made plain, took place when Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, drank fermented wine from the holy vessels dedicated to the Temple in Jerusalem.

***Daniel 5:2** Belshazzar, whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein.*

Over and over again we see the catastrophic results brought on by alcohol consumption. In the case of Belshazzar, he lost a kingdom in one day. Alcohol was responsible for Noah becoming naked and cursing his own son. In addition, alcohol played a major role in the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters,

which produced two formidable enemies – Ammon and Moab – who would harass Israel for generations. Again, alcohol unleashed swift and irreversible judgment upon Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron.

The examples above challenge the notion that one can drink in moderation. If men like Noah and Lot, giants of the faith, became drunk, then we cannot hope to avoid their sins if we flirt with alcohol. *All it takes is one careless moment to become drunk with unforeseeable consequences.* To maintain that an individual can drink in moderation without getting drunk is delusional. The overall letter and spirit of the Bible is one of zero tolerance - it is more prudent to even avoid *looking at wine*, as Solomon advocates:

***Proverbs 23:31*** *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.*

Above all, let us remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who warned us about *surfeiting* and *drunkenness* in the last days (Luke 21:34), a fact which all the research and statistics shared in this booklet confirm. I believe we are the generation of the last days. Something special was expected and required from the first generation of Christians. They



had to persuade a hostile world to embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior. Clearly, the same is required of the last generation of Christians who will also face enormous hostility and satanic opposition. Just as the first generation of Christians were given a unique anointing of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the Great Commission (Luke 24:49 *endued with power from on high*), we, the generation of the last days, must also expect a fresh outpouring of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:6).

If the above is true, then it becomes all the more necessary that we abhor and expunge alcohol from our lives, for where the Spirit of God dwells in power, alcohol is banished. If we are to be the forerunners of the Second Advent of Christ, like John the Baptist was, then let us resolve to become teetotalers for Christ.

***Luke 1:15*** *For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*



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***Numbers 6:24*** *The Lord bless thee, and keep thee:*

***Numbers 6:25*** *The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:*

***Numbers 6:26*** *The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*