



Cross Impact IUPUI

Lesson 1 — *Alcohol and the Christian*

Spring 2015 Semester

Thursday, February 5

UNDERSTANDING ALCOHOL

- Alcohol refers to ethyl or grain (esp. corn) alcohol. Ethanol is the active ingredient found in alcoholic beverages.
- Alcohol is a depressant, meaning that it reduces functional or nervous activity. What that means is that it affects one's judgment and coordination.
- Short-term effects: distorted vision, hearing, and coordination; altered perceptions and emotions; impaired judgment; bad breath; hangovers
- Long-term effects: loss of appetite, vitamin deficiencies, stomach ailments, skin problems, sexual problems, liver damage, heart damage, central nervous system damage, memory loss, cancer, pregnancy problems
- "Alcoholism" (or "Alcohol Dependence") is the disease-term that our society uses to label a lifestyle drunkard. Symptoms include:
 - **craving** – strong need or urge to drink
 - **loss of control** – not being able to stop drinking
 - **physical dependence** – withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety
 - **tolerance** – the need for greater amounts of alcohol in order to get "high"
- Alcohol problems include:
 - **alcoholism**
 - **alcohol abuse**
 - **irresponsibility or inability** (at home, work, school)

- **crime & auto accidents**
- **medical conditions**

ALCOHOL STATISTICS

- **Addiction** — "How many of you know of someone in your family who has been adversely affected by alcohol?"
 - There are more than 12 million alcoholics in America. Three-fourths of all adults drink alcohol, and 6% of them are alcoholics. 15% of U.S. residents are considered "problem drinkers." ~30% of Americans report experiencing an alcohol disorder at one point in their lifetime.
 - The [World Health Organization](#) estimates that there are 140 million people with alcoholism worldwide.
 - There are 10.8 million underage drinkers in the United States. (In 2000, nearly 7 million people ages 12 to 20 were binge drinkers.) More than 1/5 of youth begin drinking before age 13; and kids who start drinking alcohol before age 15 are 5 times more likely to develop alcohol abuse or dependence than people who first used alcohol at age 21 or older. Three-fourths of all high school seniors report being drunk at least once. 70% of young people engage in heavy drinking by ages 19 and 20. One in six teens binge drinks, yet only 1 in 100 parents believe his or her teen binge drinks.
 - Americans spend \$197 billion each day on alcohol.
- **Accidents**
 - Each year in America 79,000 deaths are attributable to excessive alcohol use (one source reported that alcohol contributes to 205,000 deaths each year).
 - Half of the yearly auto accident fatalities are a result of alcoholic consumption. Statistics indicate that drunk driving results in 1 injury every minute and 1 death every 32 minutes. On average, two in three people will be involved in a drunk driving crash in their lifetime.

- Drunk drivers cost the United States approximately 50 billion dollars every year.

- **Abuse**

- In cases of domestic partner or child violence, 35% of offenders were under the influence of alcohol.
- Alcohol is a leading factor in child maltreatment and neglect cases, and is the most frequent substance abused among these parents.
- One in every twelve marriages dissolves because of drinking.
- Approximately 700,000 students are assaulted by other students who have been drinking and about 100,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.
- Alcohol is directly connected to one-half of the homicides and one-third of the suicides each year. Teen alcohol use kills 4,700 people each year—that’s more than all illegal drugs combined.
- Life expectancy for the alcoholic is reduced by at least a decade.

“Alcohol is deadly in this culture” (Piper)—it kills marriages, jobs, people. We must be realistic about the world in which we live, and when we are, it really helps frame this discussion in the right context—our own!

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

- **Drunkenness is clearly prohibited.**

- **Key text** – Ephesians [5:18](#)
 - *Surface Command:* don’t get drunk.
 - *Deeper Principle:* When “the days are evil” (v. 16; i.e., fear, discouragement, anxiety, disappointment, etc.), don’t turn to alcohol, but to God’s Spirit (v. 18)—after all, He is our portion (Psalm 73:25-26).

- **Destruction is predicted upon drunkards.**

- *Proverbs 20:1* [written to help us live skillfully, by someone who tried everything] — “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.”
- *Proverbs 23:19-21, 29-35* — “Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags. ... Who has woe? Who has sorrow? [so much for drowning out one’s sorrow {cf. 31:6-7}—ironically, only more sorrow and “evil”] Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. ‘They struck me,’ you will say, ‘but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink.’”
- *Isaiah 5:11* — “Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them!”
- *1 Corinthians 6:9-11* — “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

- ***Drunkenness is associated with sin.***
 - *Noah: Genesis 9:20-25* — It led to shame and the cursing of Noah's son, Canaan.
 - *Lot: Genesis 19:35-36* — It was the catalyst for Lot's daughters committing incest with him.
 - *Galatians 5:19-20* — "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."
- ***Drinking must be considered through principles.***
 - ***Principle of Conscience — I must avoid whatever violates my conscience.***
 - *Romans 14:14, 22, 23* — In these debatable matters, one's conscience (i.e., "anyone who thinks it unclean" v. 14) is as binding as reality (i.e., "nothing is unclean in itself" v. 14). To violate one's conscience (i.e., "whoever has doubts...not from faith") is to sin (v. 23).
 - *1 Corinthians 8:7, 12* — One's past experiences can affect his present consideration of these issues, and he should not be pushed to violate his experience-impacted conscience.
 - **Application:** John Piper, "Now if there were some good reason, I could work to reeducate my conscience on this matter. But in view of what I know about alcohol, I have no inclination to rid myself of my conscientious misgivings about the use of alcohol. Many young evangelicals need to have a far more positive attitude toward the sensitivities of conscience which many owe to their parents and church. It is a mark of great immaturity to be constantly kicking against the ways our parents taught us. I know I owe my conscientious misgivings

about alcohol to my parents. We never drank, and I am glad. I never felt the least slighted. On the contrary, we were the happiest family I ever knew. Total abstinence paid off."

"I might just add that I am also glad about some other so-called fundamentalist no-nos. My parents almost never went to movies, and I almost never go to movies. The reason is very simple: there are almost no movies that don't ask me to be entertained by attitudes, motives, and actions which Jesus died to eradicate. My heart will not allow me to be entertained by worldliness. My parents never smoked, and their way has proven best. Seminars on how to quit smoking would have been laughed to scorn as religious bigotry 25 year ago. Today it's a law in Minnesota that you can't blow smoke in my face in a restaurant. I just mention a few of these wonderful 'hang-ups' to illustrate that young believers should be very slow to liberate themselves from the scruples of their parents. And in any case, one should never act against one's conscience. This is the first reason I am a teetotaler."

- ***Principle of Self-control — I must avoid whatever inhibits self-control.***
 - *Proverbs 31:4-7* — "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted." Those in authority are exhorted to avoid alcohol for the very reason that it impedes reason, discernment, and self-control. On the contrary, regardless of whether he is sincere or sarcastic in verses 6-7, alcohol is "reserved" for those "perishing," "in bitter distress," in "poverty," and in "misery" who need an escape from reality.

- *Isaiah 28:7-8* — The spiritual leaders are shamefully described as being completely unable to fulfill their responsibilities because of the affects of alcohol.
 - *1 Corinthians 6:12* — Pushing back against the Corinthian libertines who were promoting their licentious slogan, Paul said, “*All things are lawful for me*, but not all things are helpful. *All things are lawful for me*, but I will not be dominated by anything.” Paul was careful to maintain the godliness of self/Spirit-control (cf. Galatians 5:13-26), refusing to be dominated by (i.e., addicted to) anything else.
 - *Ephesians 5:17-18* — To help us “understand what the will of the Lord is” (v. 17). we need to “be filled with the Spirit,” not “drunk with wine” (v. 18). The Spirit leads to understanding, but alcohol leads to “debauchery.”
 - *1 Thessalonians 5:6-8* — The Christian is called to “sobriety” which is certainly a spiritual characteristic, but is also clearly meant physically in this passage, in that it is contrasted with being “drunk.”
 - *1 Peter 5:8* — The reason for such spiritual and physical sobriety (they go hand-in-hand) is that our Adversary is always sober and set in his goal to “devour” us.
 - **Application:** Since alcohol is a mind-altering drug with incredible and well-documented addictive power, the Christian has to sincerely evaluate alcohol in light of this principle. It is worth noting, as many have, that “you cannot get drunk if you don’t drink.” (Statistic)
- ***Principle of Sanctification*** — *I must avoid whatever is hindering my growing relationship with the Lord.*
 - *Deuteronomy 29:6* — The reason that God had commanded Israel to abstain from alcohol was so that they “may know that I am the LORD your God.”
 - *1 Corinthians 9:24-27* — In our Christian “race,” we must run with purpose and discipline, which includes “sacrifice,” in order that we don’t “disqualify” ourselves.
 - *1 Corinthians 10:23* — Again rebuking the slogan of the libertines, Paul responds, “*All things are lawful*, but not all things are helpful. *All things are lawful*, but not all things build up.” If it doesn’t “build me up” into greater Christlikeness, then it isn’t “helpful.”
 - *1 Thessalonians 5:21-22* — “Test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” This is more than mere black/white living, but even the avoiding what might become a source or doorway into evil (cf. Romans 13:14).
 - **Application:** Many Christian who drink find themselves ever unable to “get on” in their Christian experience and to grow into greater godliness. It may be that their commitment to alcohol is trumping their commitment to “make every effort to supplement [their] faith with [excellence]...and self-control” (cf. 2 Peter 1:5-7).
 - ***Principle of Worship*** — *I must avoid whatever would hinder my active worship of God.*
 - *Exodus 20:3* — One of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” We must beware of idolatry in our Christian lives.
 - *1 Corinthians 10:31* — In even the mundane and habitual aspects of our lives, we are to “do all to the glory of God.”

- *Ephesians 5:18* — We are to manifest the distinctive filling of the Spirit in our lives, not debauched intoxication.
- **Application:** For many people, alcohol has become an idol/god (we call it an “addiction”), which renders them unable to actively glorify (i.e., exalt, magnify, fear, adorn, etc.) God. Instead, many times such alcoholic idolatry causes the Word of God to be reviled (Titus 2:5), empowers the opponents of Christianity in their evil diatribes (Titus 2:8), and undermines the beauty of our Savior (Titus 2:10). There is a reason why, even today, many non-Christians ask questions like, “Wait...you drink? I thought Christians didn’t do that.” Sometimes the children of this world are wiser than the children of light (cf. Luke 16:8). We have an opinion of God to promote and protect, and we do that not only with our lips, but with our lives.
- **Principle of Association** — *I must avoid whatever would make me appear to be in conformity with this temporary and anti-God world system.*
 - *Romans 12:2* — Christians are to “not be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewal of [their] mind,” again, in order to “discern what is the will of God.”
 - *1 John 2:15-17* — Christians are commanded to “not love the world or the things in the world,” including “the desires of the flesh.”
 - **Application:** It is hard to think of something else that is more obviously a “worldly” love than alcohol (i.e., sex certainly being another one). Certainly, then, this principle need to be considered by every Christian as it relates to this issue of drinking alcohol. Not only may alcohol’s earthiness/worldliness blur one’s distinctiveness (i.e., making him appear worldly, when he is indeed “other-worldly” [Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:1-4]), but it’s mind-altering nature will also hamper his ability to “renew” his mind through careful, Spirit-controlled meditation on God’s truth/reality in His Word and will lessen his ability to “discern” God’s will. When it comes to this principle, “the desires of the flesh” are in conflict with “desires of the Spirit” (cf. Galatians 5:16-17), and the crucified Christian (cf. Galatians 5:24) will prayerfully, thoughtfully, and humbly consider how this principles relates in his life, not only in the area of alcohol, but in every area of decision and association. Don’t fear being obviously associated with God (cf. James 4:4-10)!
- **Principle of Affect** — *I must avoid whatever would adversely affect the spiritual progress of my brothers and sisters in Christ.*
 - *1 Corinthians 8:13* — Although Paul was convinced that there was no longer a distinction between clean and unclean food for the New Covenant Christian, he nonetheless loved his brothers and sisters to the extent that he made this decision: “if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”
 - *1 Corinthians 10:23* — “*All things are lawful*, but not all things are helpful. *All things are lawful*, but not all things build up.” We looked at this verse earlier, but the context of this passage demonstrates that its primary application is mutual, not personal—that is, if a certain activity doesn’t “build up” my fellow Christians (but tears them down), then it isn’t “helpful.”
 - *Romans 14:13* — Rather than judging the convictions/standards of others or selfishly forcing my own on others, I should “rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.”

- *Romans 14:15-21* — Christians are counseled, “Do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil” (v. 16), which can happen when you selfishly insist upon your understanding/conviction/ standard to the detriment of those who follow you into sinful violation of their conscience. Loving deference should trump personal freedom! Christian community is not about personal preferences and individual freedom, but about mutual “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (v. 17). This should be our pursuit (v. 19)!
- **Application:** We never make decisions in a vacuum—they inevitably affect those watching us: family, friends, church, peers, younger people, etc. Paul summarizes this point most clearly in Galatians 5:13. He says that Christian freedom was never about you; it was always about others—“Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

Transition: Now, let’s sharpen our focus even further. As we evaluate this issue biblically, we must also do so within the firm and glorious reminder that we are followers of Jesus—seeing Him, savoring Him, and sharing Him. Our goal, as His disciples, is to know, love, live, and give Jesus—this is our single focus that must affect the way we think through issues like this.

ALCOHOL AND THE GOSPEL

• ***We must remember who we are – the people of God***

- *1 Corinthians 6:19-20* — We are “not our own, for [we] were bought with a price...[to] glorify God in [our] body.” We are the house of the God of the universe the humanity’s Rescuer!
- *Ephesians 3:17-19* — We belong to Christ in a deep and full relationship of love. In fact, Paul prays here that Christ would “take up residence” and be at home within us. There’s a difference between a house and a home—what kind of a dwelling is our bodies for Christ?

- *1 Peter 2:9-12* — We are “priests,” bringing people to God. We are “God’s people” in order to represent and promote His “excellences,” which purpose Israel failed in (v. 9). To do this, we must heed Peter’s admonition in verses 11-12, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” We are no longer under Law, but notice here that grace gives the same exhortation—“be distinct in order to be attractive!”
- **Application:** We are “saints” (“set-apart ones”) and should be distinct (cf. Titus 2:1-14). We give people an opinion of God!
- ***We must remember how we should walk – Spirit-filled***
 - *Ephesians 4:1, 17; 5:2, 6-18* — There is a certain “walk” for the believer, motivated by the experience of God’s lavish saving grace (cf. Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:4-10; hence the “therefore” in 4:1) and characterized by nobility (4:1), transformation (4:17), love (5:2), light (5:8), wisdom (5:15), and Spirit-filling (5:18). The “walk” of “light” (5:8) is evident by that which is “good and right and true” (5:9)—in light of the aforementioned facts and stats, does that describe our society’s alcohol pandemic?
 - *1 Thessalonians 5:19-22* — There is a caution and carefulness to how the Christian should make decisions and behave.
- ***We must remember what we are doing – representing the Light***
 - *1 Corinthians 10:31-33* — Our goal in everything should be to bring glory to God by bringing people to God.
 - *Ephesians 5:6-18* — We should be children of Light, walking in the Light (cf. John 1:4-13; 3:19-21), because the ones we need to rescue are in the darkness. They won’t sense the difference unless we really are Light (vv. 14-18). We must shine the Light and not do anything to dim the Light! If what we call Light looks like their darkness, why would they want to join us?

- *Colossians 4:5* — “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.”
- *1 Peter 2:9-12 (cf. 4:1-7)* — “But [we] are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light” (v. 9). Now, we are to live in such a way that “evildoers” may see our new “good deeds” and be visited by God in saving faith (vv. 11-12).
- ***We must remember the enemy’s tactics – spiritual blindness***
 - *1 Corinthians 6:9-10* — Those who persist in alcoholism have no hope in eternity!
 - *2 Corinthians 4:1-6* — Satan’s desire as “the god of this world” is to “blind the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (v. 4) lest His Word effect the same powerful creation (i.e., recreation) that it did in Genesis (v. 6). The facts and statistics we considered at the beginning makes it clear that this is one tool that Satan is using to keep people in spiritual blindness and in jeopardy of eternal ruin. Furthermore, it seems that he has used media and technology to make alcohol look desirable, relevant, “in,” and innocent, while concealing the destructive facts/stats we considered first.
 - *Ephesians 2:1-3* — “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Christians are wise to ask what “the course of this world,” what it means to “follow the prince of the power of the air” in our culture, and what are “the passions of our flesh” and the “desires of the body” in order that we might activity work to rescue people from that spiritual bondage (cf. Ephesians 6:12).
- **Application:** John Piper, “It is clear that millions and millions of people are stumbling over alcohol and ruining their lives, their families, and their businesses. Christians ought to care about that and ought to want to say something and do something. What I choose to say is, ‘Stop drinking, America!’ Or, since America is not listening to me, I say, ‘Stop drinking, Bethlehem [the name of his church]!’ And I choose to oppose the carnage of alcohol abuse by boycotting the product. If people can go on hunger strikes to make a political statement, and boycott Nestle’s products to make a statement about child nutrition and third world exploitation; if people can go without lettuce for the sake of solidarity with Southern Californian farm workers, or swear off white bread and granulated sugar, is it really so prudish or narrow to renounce a highway killer, a home destroyer, and a business wrecker. If we were ever hesitant to make a social statement about the tragic effect of alcohol abuse on our land for fear that we would be out of step with the times, we can put that hesitancy aside forever” (Piper).

And the physical death that this “highway killer, home destroyer, and business wrecker” brings is just the beginning. Spiritual life and death are on the line; souls are at stake; eternity is in the balance! The enemy’s tactic is clear—to create and continue spiritual blindness. Our counterattack is also clear—to take the verbal (spoken) and visible (lived) grace of the gospel and minister it boldly, activity, and tirelessly to those who are still in bondage.

CONCLUSION

So, drunkenness is clearly out, but what about drinking? That is a decision that every believer must make for himself/herself (Romans 14:4, 22-23), and one which we must do in total commitment to the gospel and the issues that flow from it. And, for many of us right now, it is as simple as submitting to our parents and spiritual leaders — to disobey them is to sinfully violate the will of God, no matter what.

REFERENCES

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