

Avoid Alcohol and Drug Abuse
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Proverbs 20:1; 23:19-21,29-35; 31:4-7

- Today we deal with one of those issues that can be sensitive among sincere Christians: What does the Bible say about alcohol?
- In thinking about this issue it occurred to me that dealing with it is like driving on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Let me explain. Have you ever driven on the Blue Ridge Parkway through the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee? One wrong turn and you're over a steep cliff like "Thelma and Louise!" So what's the safest way to avoid the danger of going over a cliff? Don't drive on the Blue Ridge Parkway!
- I was raised in a very typical Southern Baptist home on the issue of alcohol. It's wrong, don't go near it! No doubt, that's the safest way to avoid the dangers of using alcohol or drugs.
- The problem is the journey of life takes us on roads that sometimes go near a cliff. That's why there are GUARDRAILS on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Scripture provides the GUARDRAILS to help us avoid going over the cliff, not only with this issue but with ALL of life's issues.
- So, rather than going with what your old Aunt Prudence thought. What does the Bible say?
- Before we even look at what Proverbs says, let's open it up to your own knowledge of what scripture says about alcohol use. **So, what do you believe the Bible says about it?**
- **Based on scripture, Is it a sin to drink alcohol? Here are some scriptures outside of Proverbs to consider:** Ephesians 5:18; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 4:3; Habakkuk 2:15; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Romans 14:21; Proverbs 31:4-7; 1 Timothy 3:3, 8 Titus 1:7.
- If scripture does not give a specific command on something, it becomes what Paul refers to in Romans 14:1 as a "disputable matter" or an "opinion." This has led to a lot of controversy among sincere believers on the issue of alcohol.
- Anyone familiar with the controversy a couple of years ago between John MacArthur and the "Young, Restless, and Reformed" movement on this subject? <http://www.gty.org/blog/B110809?term=beer>
- Anyone hear last fall that Moody Bible Institute changed their position on use of alcohol among faculty and staff? <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/september/moody-bible-institute-drops-employee-alcohol-tobacco-ban.html>
- Now the use of illegal drugs used to be more cut and dried. If it's illegal, it's a sin to possess or use it. Not so simple these days:
- Our Curriculum's Lesson Question is: What's the harm if I use alcohol or drugs for pleasure?
- Perhaps that could be the new state motto in Colorado!

Here's a news story from THIS PAST THURSDAY. The headline: Playground pot trade lands fourth-graders in hot water. I'm quoting CNN lest anyone fear this has a conservative slant: <http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/24/us/colorado-marijuana-fourth-graders/>

Key quotes:

Marijuana has been legal for recreational use since January 1, so the grandparents involved haven't broken state law, said John Gates, the school district's safety director. But he doesn't feel they're without blame. They're guilty, at the least, of irresponsibility "for not securing their weed," Gates said.

"If the marijuana hadn't been accessible, this wouldn't have happened," he said.

In a letter that went home with students, Monfort Elementary School Principal Jennifer Sheldon emphasized the new responsibilities that Colorado parents face with the legalization of marijuana.

"We urge all parents, grandparents and anyone who cares for children to treat marijuana as you would prescription drugs, alcohol or even firearms," the letter said. "This drug is potentially lethal to children, and should always be kept under lock and key, away from young people."

The children involved will be disciplined, but not expelled.

"We aren't trying to harm fourth-grade students who made a bad choice," she said. "This is an adult problem."

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- What a world we live in that they have to send that kind of note home in elementary school!
- Can a Christian drink alcohol? Should a Christian drink alcohol? What about legalized drug use? Is it WISE?
- Proverbs is a book of WISDOM. Let's see what Solomon had to say. Let's also get the advice of the mother of King Lemuel in Proverbs 31. We begin in 20:1.

Proverbs 20:1 (ESV)

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler,
and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

- Solomon gives alcohol two "personalities" here. We call that personification.
- **What is the personality of a "mocker?" How about a "brawler?"**
- **So, how can alcohol change your personality?**
- **What does it mean to be led astray? Who usually leads someone "astray?"**

Proverbs 23:19–21 (ESV)

19 Hear, my son, and be wise,
and direct your heart in the way.

20 Be not among drunkards
or among gluttonous eaters of meat,

21 for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty,
and slumber will clothe them with rags.

- Solomon expands his warning beyond just the bar, now we can't hang out at Golden Corral!
- **What is Solomon really saying? What kind of people does he say to avoid? Why do they come to poverty?**
- There is tremendous peer pressure to abuse alcohol and drugs. With friends like that who needs enemies?
- **Any thoughts or comments on those verses?**
- Of course, advertising portrays alcohol use as cool. Those Super Bowl ads are effective.
- Solomon writes the REAL advertising copy in 23:29-35. Here's the real story:

Proverbs 23:29–35 (ESV)

29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
Who has strife? Who has complaining?

Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?

30 Those who tarry long over wine;

those who go to try mixed wine.

31 Do not look at wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup
and goes down smoothly.

32 In the end it bites like a serpent
and stings like an adder.

33 Your eyes will see strange things,
and your heart utter perverse things.

- A pretty accurate description of someone who is intoxicated.
- Then in the next two verses Solomon uses some unusual imagery...

34 You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
like one who lies on the top of a mast.

35 "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."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says of these two verses:

Drunkenness also leads to mental problems (23:33): hallucinations and imagining confusing ("perverse or abnormal"; see comments on 2:12) things. Physically a drunkard is off balance as he walks. In his stupor he may imagine himself moving like a sailor swaying at the top of a ship's rigging. Also a drunkard is insensitive to pain when people hit him (cf. "bruises," 23:29). Sensing his stupor he still longs to escape by having another drink. Alcohol controls him; he is a slave to wine.

• **Any thoughts or comments on those verses?**

- What about the toll alcohol or drug abuse can take on living responsibly?
- Proverbs 31 was written by a King named Lemuel (that's all we know about him) based on what his mother taught him. You might say SHE was the ORIGINAL Proverbs 31 woman.
- She told her son the king...in 31:4-7,

Proverbs 31:4–7 (ESV)

4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
it is not for kings to drink wine,
or for rulers to take strong drink,

5 lest they drink and forget what has been decreed
and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

6 Give strong drink to the one who is perishing,
and wine to those in bitter distress;

7 let them drink and forget their poverty
and remember their misery no more.

- This speaks to those in authority who make poor decisions because their judgement is clouded by mind-altering substances.
- According to a 2011 study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), adults in Washington D.C. abuse more alcohol than anyone else in the country.
- The report finds that 8.1 percent of adults 26 or older in D.C. are alcohol dependent.

- Washington D.C. also ranked high for marijuana and cocaine use. <http://www.ibtimes.com/washington-dc-adults-are-nations-top-drug-and-alcohol-abusers-820921>
- It's no wonder we often look at the decisions in Washington and ask, "What are they smokin'?"
- This isn't just an issue of government leaders or even business leaders.
- If you went in to do your taxes and your accountant was drunk or stoned, would you complete the task? Your doctor? Your mechanic?
- What about the father or mother who are to be the leaders in the home?
- Verses 6 and 7 could mean it's one thing to use controlled substances to manage pain or anguish. But we don't want leaders making decisions in that condition.
- **Any thoughts or comments on those verses?** Let's wrap up...

So, What's The Takeaway?

- Back to the original Lesson Question: What's the harm if I use alcohol or drugs for pleasure?
- The safest approach is to stay away from driving near the "cliffs."
- But since life takes us near cliffs, we need "guardrails" provided in scripture.
- These verses in Proverbs just confirm what we already know about alcohol (and let's apply that to drugs); Abusing them leads to pain; suffering; and heartache.
- Other scripture makes it clear that drunkenness (let's include "getting high") is actually a SIN.
- It's also unwise to hang out with the "Hangover" crowd at the risk of become one of them.
- However, since the Bible doesn't COMMAND we abstain, this becomes a PERSONAL DECISION each of us has to make. If you've decided to abstain, then it's settled for you.
- However, if you're wrestling with this issue as we apply this lesson, here are some questions:
- Does my choice about the use of alcohol or drugs reflect my opinion or what scripture says?
- Can I exercise my FREEDOM in Christ in this area with a clear conscience?
- Are there health or family history issues to consider?
- Knowing that God sees everything I do, would He be pleased with my choice in this area?
- What if I am a Spiritual leader in the church? What about my leadership at home?
- What about my influence on others for the cause of Christ?

1 Corinthians 10:23–24 (ESV) tells us...

23 "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

- Knowing that one day I will explain to God my choice, face to face, what will I choose?
- We can only answer those questions for ourselves through sincere prayer and asking God to direct our choices by touching our hearts.