What The Bible Says About ---
Wednesday, December 2, 2015
Part Fifteen

What The Bible Says About - ALCOHOL AND MARIJUANA

What do all these people have in common:

Bradley Cooper / Rob Lowe / Robert Downey, Jr. / Tyra Banks / Jennifer Hudson / Jennifer Lopez / Naomi Campbell / Tom Cruise / Tim McGraw / Donald Trump / Warren Buffett / Brett Favre / Bee Gees / Penn Jillette / Steve Jobs / Stephen King / Jay Leno / David Letterman / Dr. Phil / Bill O'Reilly / Albert Pujols / Jim Carrey / Eric Clapton / Elton John / Eddie Murphy / Garry Oldman / The Osmonds / Al Pacino / Linda Ronstadt Ringo Starr / John Travolta, Shania Twain - and a host of others.... These are all listed on the internet as professing non-drinkers. Think of it - all of these famous people declare they do not drink alcoholic beverages. Interesting because today it is often claimed, “Why, everybody drinks.” Sometimes it seems that way; however, it is not true. The list of tee-totalers, non-drinkers, is very lengthy.

The reasons given for their abstinence is quite revealing. Here are some of them:

1. Alcohol is addictive. One wrote: “I never made a decision to increase how much booze I was drinking. It just happened. Anything that ‘just happens’ without me being fully aware of why, how and when is concerning. I had no control over it.”

2. Alcohol never satisfies. “Alcohol demands alcohol. It wants more and if you don’t satisfy the craving it begins to throw a fit., It’s no fun to live a life of counting drinks and feeling like you are missing out.”

3. Being a non-drinker is a healthy decision. “I told myself that drinking red wine had health benefits. When I did the research I was shocked. Not only is that not true, but alcohol is declared a known carcinogen in 1988. And, of course, there’s the reality that drinking makes you feel like ____ the day after.”

4. Life is much more enjoyable without booze in it. “I have significantly more fun without drinking. It’s amazing how many adults - the vast majority - believe that alcohol is key to having a good time. I blew this myth out of the water through some self-experimentation and realized the feelings I though I enjoyed from alcohol are really just a placebo.”
5. I feel so better - every single day. “I don’t worry now about how much I am
drinking - ever. That makes every night out and every morning after significantly more
fun. I have more money because drinking is expensive. I have effortlessly lost weight.”

6. Your brain works better. “The truth is, alcohol made me dumb. My jokes got
worse, my stories were goofy and my nights became monotonous and un-memorable.”

But those names and reasons aside, interesting though they may be, our rule book for life
is the Bible, not the biographies or thoughts of these famous people. SO WHAT DOES
THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DRINKING?

THE PRESSURE TO DRINK

In the days prior to ministry - and even in later years while sustaining my family while
starting churches- I was in the media business, radio and TV. I was always told by my
employer that I would have to do liquor ads. I always told him or her that under no
circumstances would I ever do one and kept my jobs by attempting to maintain the highest
degree of excellence in broadcasting. I never lost a job.

The Spirit-filled believer is not tempted to succumb to this booze temptation. This is
due to many reasons - but not always biblical ones, strange to say. Traditions of
Pentecostal believers need to be regularly reviewed in the light of not only Scripture but
also societal practice in order to faithfully witness to each generation. We also continue
to confront unjust and destructive social ills that harm people God created and loves.

THE BIBLE AS OUR GUIDE

I am going to be painfully up front with you in this study.

• Some people insist that the Bible forbids consumption of any alcoholic drink.
• Others have been less certain of an absolute prohibition but have insisted that the
biblical warnings about alcohol abuse make it prudent and Christlike to abstain.
• Still others have insisted that the Bible permits and indeed approves moderate
consumption of alcoholic drinks.

Proponents of all three views appeal to the Scriptures, our only “infallible rule for faith
and practice.” In the face of sincere disagreement among equally devout believers, this
study is committed to be objective and accurate in both its biblical exegesis and its
assessment of alcohol use and abuse on both individuals and society.

I am intrigued by God’s command to the parents of Samson and John the Baptist:
Judges 13:1-5

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

[2] And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. [3] And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. [4] Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: [5] For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

Luke 1:13-17

But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. [14] And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. [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. [16] And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. [17] And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Let’s be clear about this: the Bible adamantly claims drunkenness as a sin. (I’ll deal with social drinking - or “moderate” as some call it a big later in this study.)

Proverbs 23:29-35

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? [30] They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. [31] Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. [32] At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. [33] Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. [34] Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. [35] They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

Look at this passage in The Message:

Who are the people who are always crying the blues? Who do you know who reeks of self pity? Who keeps getting beat up for no reason at all? Whose eyes are
bleary and bloodshot? It's those who spend the night with a bottle, for whom
drinking is serious business. Don't judge wine by its label or its bouquet, or its full-
bodied flavor. Judge it rather by the hangover it leaves you with — the splitting
headache, the queasy stomach. Do you really prefer seeing double, with your
speech all slurred, reeling and seasick, drunk as a sailor? "They hit me," you'll say,
"but it didn't hurt. They beat on me, but I didn't feel a thing. When I'm sober
enough to manage it....bring me another drink."

Wine as the fruit of the vine was a common table drink in Old Testament times.
Sometimes the wine drunk by the Israelites was clearly fermented and presented a
potential problem for intoxication. The very first mention of wine in the Old Testament is
connected with drunkenness, shame and a curse: Genesis 9:21-25

And he (Noah) drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his
tent. [22] And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his
two brethren without. [23] And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both
their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their
faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. [24] And Noah awoke
from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. [25] And he said,
Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

The strong warnings about fermented wine appear in the Old Testament, such as "wine
is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."
(Proverbs 20:1)

Or "the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up
of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink, they err in vision, they stumble in
judgment." (Isaiah 28:7)

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT STUDY BIBLE NOTES ON PAGE 958

To be perfectly frank in this discussion, there are some scriptures that speak of wine in a
more favorable light and in a context of joy. Zech. 10:7 And they of Ephraim shall be
like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine; yea, their children shall
see it, and be glad; But the joy does not originate with the drinking; continue reading:
Zech. 10:7 their heart shall rejoice in the Lord. HERE IS A PRINCIPLE: ALL
POSITIVE REFERENCES TO WINE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, SUCH AS THE
ZECHARIAH PASSAGE, MUST BE VIEWED IN THE LIGHT OF MANY
PASSAGES THAT DESCRIBE THE DISASTROUS OUTCOME OF INTOXICATING
WINE SUCH AS: Genesis 19:30-38

And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters
with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two
daughters. [31] And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father is old, and there
is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth: [32]
Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may
preserve seed of our father. [33] And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. [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. [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. [36] Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. [37] And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day. [38] And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.

Proverbs 31:4-5  It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: [5] Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.

THE NAZARITES AND WINE

Nazarites were an example to all Israelites of the higher standard of holiness in their lifestyle and commitment to God. According to God's clear instructions, Nazarites were to abstain completely from wine and strong drink. In fact they were not to eat or drink any product made from the grape or grapevine either in liquid or solid form. Most likely God gave this command as a safeguard against the temptation to use intoxicating drinks and against the possibility of a Nazarite drinking alcoholic wine by mistake: 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. God did not want any totally devoted person to be exposed to the possibility of intoxication or addiction. THUS, THE HIGHEST STANDARD PUT BEFORE GOD'S PEOPLE WITH RESPECT TO ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES WAS TOTAL ABSTINENCE. The same total consecration to God and His highest standards of holiness is something Christians should emulate. Romans 12:1-2  I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. [2] And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. 2 Cor. 6:17  Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, We should avoid anything that might draw us into sin or cause a brother to stumble.

THE HOLY SPIRIT STUDY BIBLE PAGE 959
WAS BIBLE - TIME WINE AND CURRENT WINE THE SAME DRINK?

Here we can get into some gray (or red or white...?) issues. The answer is "probably not." However I can list three basic differences:

- The wine of the Biblical era had significantly less alcohol content
- Ancient wine - historically and biblically - was most often at least diluted prior to consumption.
- The distillation process for liquors had not been developed.

According to some history books, ordinary fermentation, even among the Roman hierarchy, did not reach much more than 2-6 percent alcohol. It is not unusual today for some table wines, fortified wines and hard liquors to have 14 percent and in cases 40-50% alcohol. Distillation that now produces alcoholic beverages with an alcohol content of 40% and more, was not invented until the Middle Ages. Hard liquor, as it is known today, was probably unknown in biblical times.

INTOXICATION IS THE ISSUE

Both ancient Greeks and ancient Jews wrote of diluting wine to avoid intoxication. In Jewish writing, the Mishnah component of the Talmud gives the acceptable ratio of 3:1. Several of the early church fathers and the Bible itself allude to the practice of diluting wine. Wine in biblical times would have ranged between 2-2.75 percent alcohol. By today's legal standards, a drink has to be 3.2 percent alcohol before it is classified as an alcoholic beverage. Clearly, the wine consumed in Bible times lacked the potency of modern alcoholic beverages.

One should also remember that wine was often needed in those times for the purification of water and for medicinal purposes. Water was not always clean and safe. In its infancy, medical science supposed that wine with a mild alcoholic content had medical applications. The Bible reports concerning the Good Samaritan attending the wounded traveler: Luke 10:34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. Both the healing and purifying properties of wine may be reflected in Paul's admonition to Timothy, 1 Tim. 5:23 Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

Wine then was a basic staple of ancient agrarian life that provided food, safe (usually diluted) beverages and was mused medicinally to sustain life. By comparison, alcoholic drinks today are most often an optional recreational beverage and are more potent and
addictive. So it is historically and hermeneutically misleading to suggest that the wine usage in the Bible times is a proper basis for today’s consumption of powerful intoxicants.

CONTEXT!

When you read or study the Bible, there are basic questions you have to consider in order to get the proper teaching from it.

- What did the Biblical author intend to say to his readers?
- Who were the readers?
- What did the first readers understand the author to be writing?
- What does the modern reader of the Bible hear in our current context and how are the scriptural themes and principles to be applied today?

There are at least three possible scenarios that help define the connection between biblical cultures and our own with reference to rules which govern behavior.

1. First, when a question clearly relates to fundamental and timeless issues, the biblical response can be very explicit. For example, the Bible prohibits STEALING. This is not difficult to understand.

2. When an issue relates to a relatively new question, it may be a greater challenge to find biblical references as authoritative for establishing modern regulations. For example: smoking has been regarded traditionally among Pentecostals as a sinful practice because it is known to harm the human body. Scripture gives us such themes as the body of a person is the temple of the Holy Spirit. However, there is no scripture that says plainly, “Thou shalt not smoke.” The practice of smoking has decelerated significantly in recent years as the public has come to understand better the harm the practice causes. The public has cited health reasons for not smoking; however, the public has also simply ignored the dangers of alcohol consumption. (And now we are dealing with state laws accepting recreational marijuana. More about that later.)

3. An even more complex situation emerges when guidance is sought about a practice that the Bible addresses in many references but does not offer a clear moral precept or directive. Thus the Bible has scores of references to wine and other alcoholic drinks, some of which appear to approve while others appear to disprove. Conflicting positions develop when the parties who ask the modern questions select topical biblical information that may APPEAR to support their predispositions, and then subjectively conclude their point view is the biblical answer and therefore a universal guide for practice. Unfortunately, principles of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics are sometimes set aside.
because of strongly-held presuppositions. In the face of conflicting conclusions based on biblical texts, it becomes necessary to refer to more general biblical principles and values for guidance.

The word “wine” in the New Testament

Most of us read the Bible in English. It is helpful to understand the original Hebrew and Greek words to better understand the nature and use of wine and other alcoholic beverages in biblical times. I am not a Greek or Hebrew scholar; however, there are good books to help translate the words.

In the Old Testament, eleven different Hebrew words are translated “wine.” The most common of them are yayin (used 14 times) and tirosh (38 times). The Hebrew lexicon list yayin as a common drink for refreshment and is often associated with intoxication. It was forbidden for Nazarites (Numbers 6:2-4 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: [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. [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.) This wine was also forbidden for priests serving in the Tabernacle (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:)

The same lexicons define tirosh as “fresh or new wine” – in effect, grape juice.

A third Hebrew word the Bible uses to refer to alcoholic beverage is shekar. This can refer to any alcoholic beverage made from grain or fruit and is intoxicating. It is always condemned in scripture.

Now....in the New Testament, the primary Greek word translated “wine” is oinos (used 34 times). One has to study the CONTEXT of the scripture to determine if it is fermented or not. Unfermented juice is identified in the Gospels as “new wine.” Matthew 9:17 Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved. Luke 5:37 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish.

The Greek word oxos is translated as “sour wine” and is found six times in the crucifixion
CONSEQUENCES IN SCRIPTURE FROM DRINKING ALCOHOL

Scriptures reveal the devastating effects that can come from drinking alcohol. Wine tends to alter one's good judgment. Proverbs 20:1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. Proverbs 31:4-6 ...it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: [5] Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. [6] Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. These and other similar verses remind us that others are often harmed by one's drinking. And it can be devastating to the drinker: Proverbs 23:29-33 Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? [30] They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. [31] Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. [32] At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. [33] Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.

JESUS' FIRST MIRACLE IN CANA

John 2:9-11 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, [10] And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. [11] This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

This event often looms huge in Christian discussions about the use of wine. The issue has been debated "hither, thither and yon;" in the Assemblies of God it is our belief because of His nature that Jesus would not have made a product that would be detrimental to those who already had too much to drink.

WHAT ABOUT THE LAST SUPPER?

Mark 14:23-25 And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. [24] And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. [25] Verily I say unto you, I will drink no
more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

In the Assemblies of God, we use common grape juice in communion. Why? Because the Greek word for wine used in these references of the Last Supper is translated “fruit of the vine” which was consistent in scripture with the prohibition against yeast or fermentation during Passover Week: Exodus 13:7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters.

WINE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The book of Acts and the Epistles (letters) of Paul express a great deal of reserve about the potential for abuse in drinking alcohol. Paul severely chastised some Corinthian believers who were getting drunk at their love feast where communion was observed: 1 Cor. 11:20-21 When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. [21] For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul pointedly charged, Ephes. 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

One pastor has explained that many believers take the “filled with the Spirit” as in filling a cup or bowl. However, Paul (who made sails for sailing ships while in Corinth - tentmaker) was saying instead, “Let the Holy Spirit fill your sails and project or move you to the destination in your life that God has ordained.” I really like that thought as it is conducive to Jesus’ commands to the disciples in Acts 1 to be filled with the Spirit.

Some have thought Paul’s admonition to Timothy, 1 Tim. 5:23 Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities as an OK to be a drinker. However, remember the context. Timothy was pastoring in Turkey and did not have the strongest physical condition. Paul was counseling him to use “a little wine” for medicinal purposes.

Now let’s get down to brass tacks here: While I do not personally believe one can make an iron-clad case in scripture against drinking alcohol, I (and the official AG position) oppose drinking on the bases of these conclusions:

- Drunkenness is always condemned in the Bible. Noah’s sad story in Genesis 9:20-27
• Lot and his daughters (Genesis 19:30-38) which led to incest
• God pronounces woe to those who run after their strong drink and are inflamed by wine (Isaiah 5:11-12)
• Drunkenness is listed by Paul as among the “acts of the flesh” and he declares that drunkenness will keep a person from inheriting the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21)

   Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, [20] Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, [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.

• Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that some of them were drunks before they were washed and justified by Christ, implying that such behavior is to cease after salvation (1 Cor. 6:11)

   And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

• Peter contrasted living the new life in Christ with running with former companions in drunken “wild living” (1 Peter 4:3-4)

   For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: [4] Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:

Drunkenness never has God’s approval and it is always a potential outcome of alcohol consumption.

SPECIFIC DANGER WARNINGS IN SCRIPTURE

1. Alcohol alters a person’s good judgment (Proverbs 31:4-5)

   It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: [5] Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.

2. Frequently brings woe, sorrow and strife (Proverbs 23:29)


3. Can cause physical harm (Proverbs 23:35)

   They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

4. Alcohol can lower one’s inhibitions, leading to shameful behavior, promiscuity and violence (Proverbs 20:1)

   Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. (Romans 13:13)

   Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering
(dissipation) and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

5. Alcohol is a mocker, a deceiver that leads people astray. Proverbs 23:31-32. Look
not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it
moveth itself aright. [32] At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an
adder.

WELL, WHAT ABOUT “MODERATION?”

Moderation is often recommended as an appropriate and desirable contemporary response
to the biblical portrayal of wine consumption. However, the New Testament does not
teach or advocate moderate drinking. Nor does it explain how one is to know when
moderation is being practiced. There is no universal definition of moderation and thus
the term is highly subjective.

Even with a well-intentioned and more disciplined practice of moderation, each user
responds differently to alcohol. Though the legal limit for drunkenness is a blood
alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08, various aspects of impairment may be present with
a BAC as low as 0.03.

Alcohol may be the “socially acceptable” drink of choice, but it is also the most addictive.
The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center points out, “Alcoholism is not defined
by what you drink, when you drink it, or even how much you drink. It is the effects of
your drinking that define the problem.”

GENETICS

One should keep in mind the genetic propensity toward alcoholism that some seem to
inherit. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) advises that
while various factors come into play, “genes are responsible for about half of the risk for
alcoholism.” The moderate drinker is naïve not to recognize the peril of addiction for
themselves or those they influence. No one sets out to be an alcoholic. But with no
reliable definition of moderation in Scripture or anywhere else, or with uncertain
knowledge of one’s tolerance for alcohol, one may easily move from being a moderate to
excessive drinker. It is reported that 51% of American adults drink regularly and more
than 38 million binge drink about four times a month (not counting the rapidly growing
population of underage drinkers). Drinking is a slippery slope!

SO....WHY NOT DRINK?

I know many followers of Jesus are shocked - as I was - while visiting various places in
Europe to see professing believers drinking alcohol. It is a fact that cannot be denied. So if believers in Germany or Italy or wherever can drink - or think they can - why not us Americans?

The believer’s commitment to either abstinence or moderation should not be based only upon scriptures; given the obvious and much publicized dangers of current alcohol consumption, as well as the biblical cautions about its dangers, Christian followers of Christ must carefully and prayerfully examine their own motives and attitudes.

Does drinking enhance the believer’s personal and private life? It is worth the publicly acknowledged risks? Given the price of alcoholic beverages, is the expense a wise application of Christian stewardship? (Just a reminder - Warren Buffett, worth billions, won’t spend the money on it.) There is an ETHICAL PRINCIPLE that must be taken into consideration.

**LOVE FOR FAMILY**

One of the primary foundations of Christianity is that Christ’s followers take care of their families. 1 Tim. 5:8 *But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.* Children, especially, who often experience peer pressure to experiment with alcohol beginning in their preteens, need the loving counter-influence of parents. Studies show that in home of social drinkers 66% of the children experimented with alcohol before adulthood. In families were parents are alcoholics, children are far more likely to suffer abuse and are themselves four times more likely to become alcoholics. Moreover, studies report that one in four children who began using any addictive substance, including alcohol AND NOW MARIJUANA, before age 18 become addicted.

**LOVE FOR OUR CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS**

Romans 14:21 *It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.* In his letter to the Roman and Corinthian churches, Paul wrote nearly three chapters to explain that even though believers may have a personal understanding of things permissible to God, they must not allow that understanding to cause other brothers and sisters to stumble and fall (Romans 14 / Romans 15 / I Corinthians 8). The principle of sacrificial loving concern for our brothers and sisters in Christ is still a reality. For moderate drinkers, consider that your practice of “moderation” may make someone with an alcohol problem even more difficult.
LOVE FOR CHRIST’S CHURCH

Ephesians 4:3   Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. From its beginning, the Church placed a premium on unity (Acts 2). Some of the harshest words of Scripture are written concerning those who for their own desires stir up strife and cause divisions among believers. Romans 16:17-18 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. [18] For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Paul severely rebuked the Corinthians for a contemptuous abuse of food and alcohol that marred the Lord’s Supper observances and led to the neglect and deprivation of fellow members. 1 Cor. 11:21 For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.

The Church (First Assembly of God) is about eternal issues and we must not allow a relatively minor issue to absorb our time and efforts. The Church must not allow itself to be distracted from its primary mission which is to seek and save the lost. We are part of a church fellowship that has a century-old tradition of abstinence from alcohol that has been gleaned from Scripture and practical experience. Romans 14:19-20 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. [20] For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

LOVE FOR SOCIETY

Mark 12:31   And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are to be “salt and light” in the world. Matthew 5:13-16 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. [14] Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. [15] Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. [16] Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Paul added, Galatians 6:10   As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all
men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. Peter added, 1 Peter 2:12  Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. As accountable citizen-believers and agents of health and healing, we are responsible to critically evaluate the impact of alcohol use and potentially harmful practices on our society.

LOVE FOR SELF

Matthew 19:19  Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. We who follow our Lord are to nurture our physical and spiritual lives in keeping with the teachings of the Bible. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, according to I Cor. 6:19 and Romans 6:13.

ABSTINENCE FROM ALCOHOL AND MARIJUANA

While this lesson and treatise has dealt primarily with alcohol, the same generally can be said of any intoxicating or mind altering drug, which includes marijuana. There are some physicians who promote marijuana for medical purposes. That is a whole other issue that we don’t have time to consider in this study tonight. But it is clear that for the Christian abstinence is the wise choice. We must faithfully rescue those who are perishing from the effects of these substances while stay clear of the use of them ourselves.

Abstinence is a moral choice. It glorifies God, protects the individual, honors fellow believers, preserves families, unifies the Church and blesses society. Abstinence is not moral legalism but Christian discipleship which inherently involves self-denial in following Christ.

Next time: What the Bible says about “The Prosperity Gospel.”