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Workshop 4

“What the Bible Says About Alcohol & Sobriety”

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“Reaching the Unreached”

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My ministry takes me to countries where the people live in poverty and under oppression, where alcohol is used to escape the realities of their harsh circumstances. Perhaps the worse oppression is their religion — they have no knowledge of Jesus Christ and His good news of salvation. “The Most Excellent Way” has become an effective means of introducing Christianity to these people — as they turn from alcohol and turn to Christ, they come to realize there is purpose for their lives. They gain an eternal perspective based upon Biblical truth. In our country, alcohol use usually begins as a means to feel pleasure for pleasure’s sake. In India and Nepal, the use of alcohol is a way to feel pleasure in the midst of harsh realities. Those of us who turn to Christ as Lord and Savior, experience joy and peace — the ultimate pleasure experience.

As we consider alcohol and sobriety, let us keep in mind that drugs are included. Whatever substance one uses — legally or illegally — can lead to bondage of body and soul.

I. What the Bible Says About “Alcohol”

Introduction

As we present society with “The Most Excellent Way” program, there are many who do not believe that alcohol is a problem. This point of view overlooks a huge amount of evidence that alcohol does great harm. Even among Christians, there is little understanding, or even awareness, that God tells us a lot about alcohol in His Word.

As we take a look at what God has to say, you will find it is a solid foundation for your leadership position in “The Most Excellent Way.” You will not only have a better personal base to present TMEW, but you will be better prepared to give a defense with confidence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope and assurance that is within you. You will be able to do this knowing that what you say is what God wants, and you can present it in a loving way, as *1 Peter 3:15 says: “...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you ...”*

The Bible does not totally forbid alcohol under all circumstances, and many people use that as an excuse before they look carefully at what the Bible actually says. So here are some of the things the Bible **does say**:

A. Alcohol Can Lead a Person Astray

Alcohol can lead a person astray. **Proverbs 20:1** says:

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

In this verse, God is saying that alcohol can lead a person astray. Many people say, “But I’m not being led astray.” “Yes, but you’re on the wrong path.” “But I’m not going to let myself be led astray.”

When you’re on the alcohol path, you are putting yourself at risk of being lead astray. Only when you are on that path, can you be led astray. That path seems right to you when you are on it, but the Bible says:

*“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”
Proverbs 14:12 NKJV*

Life is so complicated, that what seems right to us is not always right. It’s because we walk by sight, and not by faith. It is only when we follow the Bible’s path that we will not be led astray.

When we leave the path that God has for us, we are disobeying God and the Bible calls that a sin. Drunkenness will keep a person out of God’s kingdom.

*“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?
Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers,
nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards,
nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”
1 Corinthians 6:9-10 NKJV*

I believe this Bible verse tells us that drunkenness is something we do wrong; and that makes it a **sin — not a disease**. I know that a majority of people, even doctors, say it’s a disease. You may not agree with me on this, but I believe that in this verse the Bible is saying that because alcohol is a choice each of us makes, it is a sin.

If alcoholism is a disease or illness:

- It’s the only disease that is bottled and sold.
- It’s the only disease that requires someone to have a license to sell.
- It’s the only disease that produces financial income for the government.
- It’s the only disease without a germ or virus cause.
- It’s the only one that spreads crime; the only disease that is spread by advertising.
- Most importantly: If alcoholism is a disease, it’s the only one that can keep a person from entering heaven.

The “kingdom of God”? That’s heaven.

The Scripture lists *drunkards* — people with a habit pattern of getting drunk — among the sins of unrighteousness. The idea here is that if we commit this sin

habitually, it reveals that we are not genuinely relying on Jesus, and are therefore not headed to heaven.

Jesus said:

“No one can serve two masters ; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.”

Matthew 6:24 NKJV

Loyalty to alcohol raises the question: “Is this person really born again?” Jesus says we cannot follow two masters. We must choose either God’s way or our own way — but we cannot have it both ways.

The goal of “The Most Excellent Way” is to guide each person off the path of alcohol by the power of God’s Holy Spirit, through faith in Jesus Christ. God wants His family to be under His influence only, and not under the influence of alcohol.

Of course, some people *seem* to be born with an inclination to use alcohol. The truth is: We are all born with the inclination to sin — alcoholism, and other life-controlling behaviors are devastating symptoms of our natural sin nature.

We can help them resist that inclination, as we walk by faith and not by sight. We need to be loving toward them and supportive as they break free. Jesus died and rose again to provide the victory over sins—including drugs and alcohol.

B. Alcohol Interferes with Wisdom

It’s well-known that alcohol interferes with wisdom. **Proverbs 31:4** says:

“It is not for kings to drink wine.”

Repeatedly in the Bible, people with responsibilities are told to refrain from alcohol. Have nothing to do with it. When you have a responsibility of any kind, including your family, then the Bible says to stay away from alcohol because it messes up your ability to think clearly. Too much is depending on your ability to act with wisdom, and you don’t want it to be functioning at anything less than 100%.

Old Testament Priests were forbidden to drink. In the New Testament, when a person took a Nazarite vow, dedicating their whole life to God, they were forbidden to drink. John the Baptist, who Jesus called the greatest man who ever lived, was forbidden to drink alcohol.

Revelation 1:6 says Jesus has made all who follow Him kings and priests. 1 Peter 2:9 says we are **“a royal priesthood.”** So this passage here in Proverbs 31:4 applies to each believer. And we are to be an example to everyone.

It is the responsibility of “The Most Excellent Way” leaders to teach and lead and guide with the facts — alcohol and drugs impair one’s ability to think clearly. It is not beneficial to believers because it interferes with wisdom.

C. Alcohol is Painful and Destructive

*“Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup,
when it swirls around smoothly;
At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper.”
Proverbs 23:31-32 NKJV*

We all know alcohol cause pain and destruction.

- In just the past 10 years, four times as many people have died in alcohol-related automobile accidents than died in the Vietnam War.
- Those who consume alcohol on a regular basis, shorten their life expectancy as much as 12 to 15 years.
- More Americans have died in alcohol related traffic crashes than in all the wars the United States has been involved in since our country was founded. (NHTSA).
- Alcohol was a factor in two-thirds of the domestic violence crimes reported. (US Dept. of Justice).
- Nearly 3 million violent crimes are reported each year. Of these, about 35% involve an offender who had been drinking. (US Dept. of Justice).

This is what the Bible says about alcohol’s destructiveness:

*“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions?
Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?
³⁰Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine.
³¹Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup,
When it swirls around smoothly;
³²At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper.
³³Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things.
³⁴Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying:
³⁵They have struck me, but I was not hurt;
They have beaten me, but I did not feel it.
When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?”
Proverbs 23:29-35 NKJV*

People say, “I can control myself”. They don’t realize alcohol takes away their ability to control themselves. They are the last ones to figure that out.

Verse 35 says: “When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?” No matter how bad things get, or how many warning alarms go off, the further into it people get, the harder it is for them to get out.

D. Alcohol is an Unnecessary Drug

*“Give strong drink to him who is perishing,
and wine to those who are bitter of heart.
Proverbs 31:6 NKJV*

In Biblical times, alcohol was used in as a medicine to comfort those suffering from

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physical and emotional pain. Today, we have medicines to reduce the pain. (Unfortunately, today many necessary drugs are abused.)

E. Alcohol is Addictive

Alcohol is a temporary fix — a bandaid for a more serious problem. It's used to escape reality. It's used to experience pleasure, and it works — temporarily. No one plans to become addicted.

But there is Good News!

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

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NKJV

Jesus will heal from within.

F. Choosing Not to Use Alcohol is a:

1. A Wise choice!

*"Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way.
Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat;
For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty..."*

Proverbs 23:19-21 NKJV

2. A Loving choice!

*"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace
and the things by which one may edify another.*

²⁰Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.

All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.

*²¹It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything
by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak."*

Romans 14:19-21 NKJV

As we grow to be more like Jesus, sometimes we are called to make choices that are best for other people. The Christian life is not all about me, me, me, and what I want. The Christian life is for others.

Romans 14 says we don't live for ourselves. If another Christian is stumbled by what we eat or drink, we are not acting in love if we eat or drink it. We are called to build each other up. We should do things in our life that will help our brothers and sisters become better followers of Jesus.

Because I love you, I'm not just thinking about what's best for me, I'm thinking of what's best for you, and it's best for you that I refrain from alcohol.

3. Supportive choice!

“Abstain from every form of evil.” ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:22 NKJV

As leaders in “The Most Excellent Way,” we are called to make wise, loving and supportive choices that are best for other people — to build them up and lead them to Jesus. Our example should not cause anyone to stumble and lead them into making a bad life-choice.

Conclusion

*“ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”
John 14:6 NKJV*

Knowing and applying Biblical truth about alcohol will set a person free from the sinful habit patterns that alcohol brings.

We can not be in a right relationship with God when we put our faith in alcohol. We must put our faith in Him.

*“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed,
not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence,
work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;
for it is God who works in you both to will
and to do for His good pleasure.”
Philippians 2:12-13 NKJV*

We trust God to give us the desire and the power to overcome dependence on alcohol, and any other life-controlling sin.

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A Prayer

*“Search me , O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen”
Psalm 139:23-24 NIV*

II. What the Bible Says About "Sober"

A. First, a Picture of NOT Being Sober

Most of us have been around the small child who starts to stick their finger or tongue into an electrical outlet. The first thing we say is, "Don't do that!" We don't explain all about how electricity is made at the SDG&E plant; and all the wires; and that. In the same way, the Word of God gives us a warning about being sober, and then when we're paying attention, the Word gives us good reasons to stay sober.

• **God gives us the warning:**

*"Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints?
Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?"*

³⁰*Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine.*

³¹*Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup,
When it swirls around smoothly;*

³²*At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper.*

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

³⁴*Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying:*

³⁵*"They have struck me, but I was not hurt;*

They have beaten me, but I did not feel it.

When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"

Proverbs 23:29-35 NKJV

• **Then God says, "Don't do that!"**

Titus 2:11-12 NKJV ~ *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live **soberly**, righteously, and godly in the present age,..."*

We should obey, because:

Proverbs 5:21 NKJV ~ *"For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He ponders all his paths."*

B. Positive instruction to be Sober

1. God commands us to be sober:

1 Peter 1:13 NKJV ~ *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be **sober**, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*

2. Being sober-minded is a requirement for serving God.

1 Timothy 3:2-3 NKJV ~ *"...blameless, ... temperate, **sober-minded**, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;..." ~*

C. Characteristics of Being Sober

First of all, God commands us to be sober.

*“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be **sober**,
and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought
to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”
1 Peter 1:13 NKJV*

“Girding up our loins” means to prepare to do hard work or go into battle. In Bible times, people wore long loose garments (as Bedouin and Arabs do to this day), which were cool in the desert heat but inconvenient for any vigorous physical activity. Before undertaking any strenuous work, they would “gird up their loins” with a belt, and tuck in any loose folds and tuck up the long skirt of the robe to free their limbs for action.

This verse means it’s not going to be mentally easy—we’re going to have to prepare for vigorous action in our minds by focusing on Jesus, putting our hope, our trust, and our faith in Him.

There are many passages in the Bible that put sobriety together with an overall picture of the way God wants us to be. When we see how God closely links sobriety with those other attitudes and behaviors, we get a clear picture of how God wants us to be. For example:

- **1 Timothy 3:2-3** NKJV ~ “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;...”
- **Titus 1:7-9** NKJV ~ “For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, **not given to wine**, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, **sober-minded**, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”
- **1 Thessalonians 5:8** NKJV ~ “But let us who are of the day be **sober**, putting on the breastplate of **faith and love**, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

Putting all these Bible verses together, “sober” means that our everyday way of behaving, thinking, and reacting is to be moderate, in touch with reality, serious, self-controlled, patient, and calm.

D. God Requires Sobriety in the Following People:

1. **His Servants**

(see 1 Timothy 3:23 and Titus 1:8, above)

2. **Wives of God’s servants**

1 Timothy 3:11 KJV ~ “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, **sober**, faithful in all things.”

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3. Old Men

Titus 2:2 KJV ~ *“That the aged men be **sober**, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.”*

4. Young Men

Titus 2:6 KJV ~ *“Young men likewise exhort to be **sober minded**.”*

5. Young Women

Titus 2:4 KJV ~ *“...teach the young women to be **sober**, to love their husbands, to love their children,...”*

6. ALL God’s People ~

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 KJV ~ *“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be **sober**. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*

E. The Necessity of Being Sober

1 Peter 5:8 NKJV ~ *“**Be sober**, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”*

Satan is so dangerous that we must be sober to resist him! He’s constantly looking for our weakest spot so he can attack. There is nothing Satan would rather do than have us go to hell with him forever. But ...

Revelation 5:5 NKJV ~ *“**Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed...**”*

I have an image of a lion roaring at us, but when we resist him in a sober way, using God’s Word and the Holy Spirit power within us, the lion leaves with his tail between his legs in cowardly retreat. Once we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, then Satan can’t devour us — but he can cause our life to be miserable and for us to miss many of God’s blessings. It’s a choice for each one of us to make. A sobering thought, indeed...

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May we all minister soberly and reverently in “The Most Excellent Way.”

***“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.
Instead, be filled with the Spirit.***

¹⁹Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,

***²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Ephesians 5:18-20 NIV

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