



# Alcohol

## A Call to Total Abstinence

This PASTOR'S GUIDE SHEET was developed by Dr. Joe K. Taylor, Senior Pastor, South Reno Baptist Church, Reno, NV • jtaylor@southreno.com  
Scriptures are printed verbatim with references noted but highlights and underlines are added. Quotes and all primary sources are footnoted.

## A Word about Alcoholism

Some say Alcoholism is a “disease” only. Though this author does see the “sickness” side of alcoholism, it must be clearly stated that alcoholism is a state that falls way short of the standard that God has called His people to—thus, it is also a sin.

To call it only a disease is to minimize it. If only a “sickness”, it is unusual as a disease, in that ...

- It is contacted solely by an act of the will
- It requires a license for sale and distribution
- It is bottled and sold
- It produces revenue for the government
- It promotes unlawful activity
- It is habit forming
- It is promoted via advertising—and lots of it (\$500 million in the US each year)
- It produces thousands of deaths on our highways each month
- It causes one to be fined and imprisoned when one exhibits its adverse symptoms
- It has no bacterial or viral cause and for which there is no corrective medicine <sup>1</sup>

Is it serious—yes! Is it simply “an illness”—no! Do we need to understand from Scripture what to do—absolutely! As with any complex issue such as alcoholism, it will take a team of churches, pastors, family, friends, medical doctors, counselors, support groups, reading, fasting and prayer to beat it.

### When is a person considered an alcoholic?

Though there are many resources to help someone self diagnose if their drinking level causes them to be considered “an alcoholic”, my simple rule of thumb is, **“if you have to ask, you are one.”** Many years ago, a man who had been delivered from drunkenness traveled across this country lecturing on the evils of alcohol. He stated that if you answer “yes” to one or two questions (below), you may be and if you answered “yes” to 3 or more, you definitely are an alcoholic.

1. Do you crave a drink at a specific time each day?
2. Do you gulp your drinks and sneak extras?
3. Do you drink to relieve feelings of anxiety or inadequacy?
4. Do you drink to escape worry and to dispel the blues?
5. Do you drink when you are overly tired in order to “get a grip?”
6. Do you drink in order to affect your peace of mind?
7. Does your drinking have an adverse affect on your home life?
8. Do you prefer to drink alone?
9. Do you require a drink the “next morning?”
10. Does your drinking have an adverse affect on your work and/or job?

<sup>1</sup> Bob Moorehead, *Counseling Yourself and Others From the Bible*, © 1994, Multnomah Books, p. 53.

# What does the Bible say to the alcoholic?

## 1. One must come to embrace a truth that alcoholism is a sin that has taken control of your life.

**Proverbs 23:29-33, NASB95** - <sup>29</sup> Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? <sup>30</sup> Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. <sup>31</sup> Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; <sup>32</sup> at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. <sup>33</sup> Your eyes will see strange things and your mind will utter perverse things.

**Ephesians 5:18, NASB95** - <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit ...

Please don't rationalize this matter. It is in the process of destroying you. It is not in keeping with God's will for your life. The quicker you acknowledge that getting drunk is a sin against God, others, and yourself, the quicker healing can begin.

## 2. Though there is "wisdom in a multitude of counselors", as the Bible says, realize that healing and the ultimate strength to defeat alcoholism comes only from God.

**Philippians 4:13, NASB95** - <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

**Hebrews 13:5-10, NASB95** - <sup>5</sup> Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," <sup>6</sup> so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid."

You need God and His power in this battle. Come to Him right now and pray fervently that God will give you His power to beat this.

## 3. Get into an environment that will help you be healthy and where you can flee from alcohol.

**1 Corinthians 15:33, NASB95** - <sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

**2 Timothy 2:22, NCV** - <sup>22</sup> But run away from the evil desires ... Try hard to live right and to have faith, love, and peace, together with those who trust in the Lord from pure hearts.

Build friendships with people who are "teetotalers" and never drink. At all cost, you must get away from the temptations of drinking.

## 4. Develop an association with friends who can encourage you and hold you accountable.

**James 5:16, NCV** - <sup>16</sup> Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so God can heal you. When a believing person prays, great things happen.

You will never have victory over alcohol (or any other sin) until the warfare becomes spiritual. The greatest people in the bible had people to encourage and hold them accountable (ie. Elisha had Elijah; Timothy had Paul, etc.) You need people too.

## 5. Remind yourself daily that drinking is harming you and those you love.

It hurts you, your body, your family, your witness, your co-workers, it robs you of money and health, it dishonors the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16) and it supports an industry that produces poverty and death in our country.

## 6. Without apology, you will need help in developing a "repentance and recovery" plan that will include pastors, counselors, support groups like AA and others, also, your friends and family. It takes many people to help one person in their battle against alcoholism.

# What are the latest statistics on Alcohol?



If a parent drinks, their child is 28 times more likely to drink and 7 times more likely to become an alcoholic.

## According to the latest research ... <sup>2</sup>

40% of US families have at least one close member affected by alcoholism  
500 Million dollars are spent advertising alcohol each year in the US  
75% of US High School teenagers drank alcohol in the last 12 months  
50% of US Jr. High students drank alcohol in the last 12 months  
There are 450 thousand diagnosed alcoholics in the US  
There are over one million injuries in alcohol related accidents in the US (1 every 32 seconds)  
There are about 18,000 deaths each year due to alcohol related accidents (1 every 32 minutes)  
On any weekday, 1 of 13 drivers in the US are legally intoxicated.  
On any weekend, 1 of 7 drivers in the US are legally intoxicated.  
In any two year period since 1975, more people were killed in accidents on US Highways than were killed in all of the Vietnam War.

## Also according to other research ...

In the US, almost 50% of all clergy drink alcohol beverages “recreationally”  
In the SBC, it is estimated that 48% of church members drink  
16% of church-goers in the US “are” or consider themselves “at risk” for being “an alcoholic”  
Only 1 of 39 parents talk to their teens about drinking  
1 of 3 college students in the US drink “to get drunk” at least once a month  
The average college student spends more on alcohol than books  
According to the AMA, “drinking” is the number three killer of adults in the US, behind cancer (at number one) and heart disease (at number two)—*Drinking is number three!*

# What does the Bible say about Alcohol (i.e., “Strong drink”?)

**Proverbs 20:1, NASB95** - <sup>1</sup> Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.

**Luke 1:15, NASB95** – [About John] <sup>15</sup> “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb.

**Isaiah 28:7, NASB95** - <sup>7</sup> And these also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink: The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused by wine, they stagger from strong drink; they reel while having visions, they totter when rendering judgment.

**Proverbs 23:29-35, NASB95** - <sup>29</sup> Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? <sup>30</sup> Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. <sup>31</sup> Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; <sup>32</sup> at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. <sup>33</sup> Your eyes will see strange things and your mind will utter perverse things. <sup>34</sup> And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast. <sup>35</sup> “They struck me, but I did not become ill; they beat me, but I did not know it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.” [King and leaders are told not to drink in Prov. 31.4-5].

**Romans 14:21, NASB95** - <sup>21</sup> It is good not ... to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.

**Observation:** The question is not, “Will it hurt me?” but “will it hurt others.” Give it time and alcohol will rob you of your witness for God, hurt others in ways you never intended, and put others at risk for harm.

<sup>2</sup> Research from multiple sources by Dr. Johnny Hunt, Senior Pastor (and his research team) at First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia. (Cf., His Message titled, “Should Christians Drink? A Biblical Commitment to Total Abstinence” via Audio CD).

# What else do we need to understand about Alcohol from Holy Scripture?

## The biblical use of the words translated “wine” and “strong drink” in the Hebrew:

1. The Hebrew Word: כָּרֵשׁ (“SHE-care”) – It is translated “strong drink” in the OT and is—in every instance—condemned except in one scripture. Proverbs 31.6 states,

**Proverbs 31:6-7, NIV** - <sup>6</sup> Give **beer** to those who are perishing ... to those who are in anguish; ... <sup>7</sup> let them drink and forget their [poor state] and remember their misery no more.

**Observation:** In this text, it is used as a narcotic ...

2. The Hebrew Word: יַיִן (YA-yin) – It is translated “wine” in the OT and is condemned in every scripture without exception. It always refers to “fermented drink”. Gen. 9.21 states,

**Genesis 9:21, NIV** - <sup>21</sup> When he drank some of its **wine**, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent.

3. The Hebrew Word: תַּיִרֹשׁ (TY-rosh) the most common Heb. word for “wine” or “drink”—this is simply translated “juice from grapes” and refers to “juice squeezed from the fruit”.

**Numbers 18:12, NIV** - <sup>12</sup> “I give you all the finest olive oil and all the finest **new wine** and grain they give the Lord as the firstfruits of their harvest.

**Proverbs 3:10, NIV** - <sup>10</sup> then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with **new wine**.

## The biblical use of the words translated “wine” and “strong drink” in the Greek:

1. The Greek Word: οἶνος (OUI-nos) the only Greek word for wine used in the NT. Depending on “case”, it is translated different ways: The *nominative case* is translated “juice from grapes”<sup>3</sup> as in John 2.1ff ...

**John 2:7-9, NIV** - <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. <sup>8</sup> Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, <sup>9</sup> and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into **wine**. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside

The *genitive case* is translated as a “strong drink” as in Mark 15:23 ...

**Mark 15:23, NIV** - <sup>23</sup> Then they offered him **wine** mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

Never is the genitive use of οἶνος ever used in the NT as a prescription for drinking strong drink.

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<sup>3</sup> Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)*. electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.

## A historical understanding is important

The “wine” of today and the “wine” of Old Testament are two different “wines”. Today, the process of fermentation involves mechanical and chemical processes that were unavailable in biblical days. Yale University estimates that “it would take 29 12 oz drinks of biblical ‘wine’ to equal 2 4 oz *martinis* today.” Evangelist Billy Graham stated about this issue, “It is clear that biblical wine was not as intoxicating as the harsh drinks of today.”<sup>4</sup>

A quote from Yale University:

*“The normal process of fermentation of ‘the fruit of the vine’ from biblical times does not produce the alcohol levels to bring on drunkenness. There must be a mechanical interference with the normal process such as the addition of pure alcohol and other mechanical processes of distillation to produce the kind of wine that is common today. The Hebrews would have referred to our wine and beer as ‘strong drink’— everywhere the Bible uses the phrase ‘strong drink’, it is condemned. Biblical wine was one part fermented wine and five parts water.”*

## Important Foundational Comments

1. **As believers in Christ, all that we do must be done because we have surrendered our life to God and His will for us. In this case, we must drink “strong drink” only if it is because we feel it is the only way to stay in God’s will for our lives.**
2. **If the “homework” is clearly done, I do not think a believer can find a biblical rationale to substantiate the drinking of “strong drink” as a beverage.**
3. **Alcohol has a tendency to relax the morals and spiritual convictions of a believer.**
4. **Again, the major issue is not “Will it hurt me?” but, “Will it hurt others”? The answer is “Yes!”**
5. **I have never met a married couple that said, “*Budweiser*<sup>TM</sup> saved our marriage.”**
6. **Some say “moderation” is the answer. I say, “moderation” is the problem. (FYI: One in ten people who drink become alcoholics. “Moderate drinkers” make up 87% of the total liquor sales—financially—in the US.)**
7. **Give it time; the alcohol will destroy your witness. (What could be more important?)**
8. **I believe that any believer who will search the scriptures and truly seek to understand—both historically and theologically—what God’s Word says, will come to this conclusion:  
***The clear, God-honoring decision for the believer is to make a biblical commitment to total abstinence concerning alcohol.*****

## Important Quotes<sup>5</sup>

*“There is, by weight, precisely the same quantity of alcohol in one jigger of whiskey—or in one glass of wine—or in one bottle of beer. One ounce of alcohol retards muscular reaction 17.4 percent; increases time required to make a decision 9.7 percent; increases errors due to lack of attention 35.3 percent, and to the lack of muscular co-ordination 59.7 percent.”* - Paul Harvey

*“Oh God, that men would put an enemy in their mouth to steal away their brain.”* - Shakespeare

*“Liquor is the Devil in liquid form. Drink is a deceiver and Satan is the great deceiver.”* - Unknown

<sup>4</sup> Statement by Dr. Johnny Hunt, Senior Pastor (and his research team) at First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia. (Cf., His Message titled, “Should Christians Drink? A Biblical Commitment to Total Abstinence” via Audio CD).

<sup>5</sup>Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers.* Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.