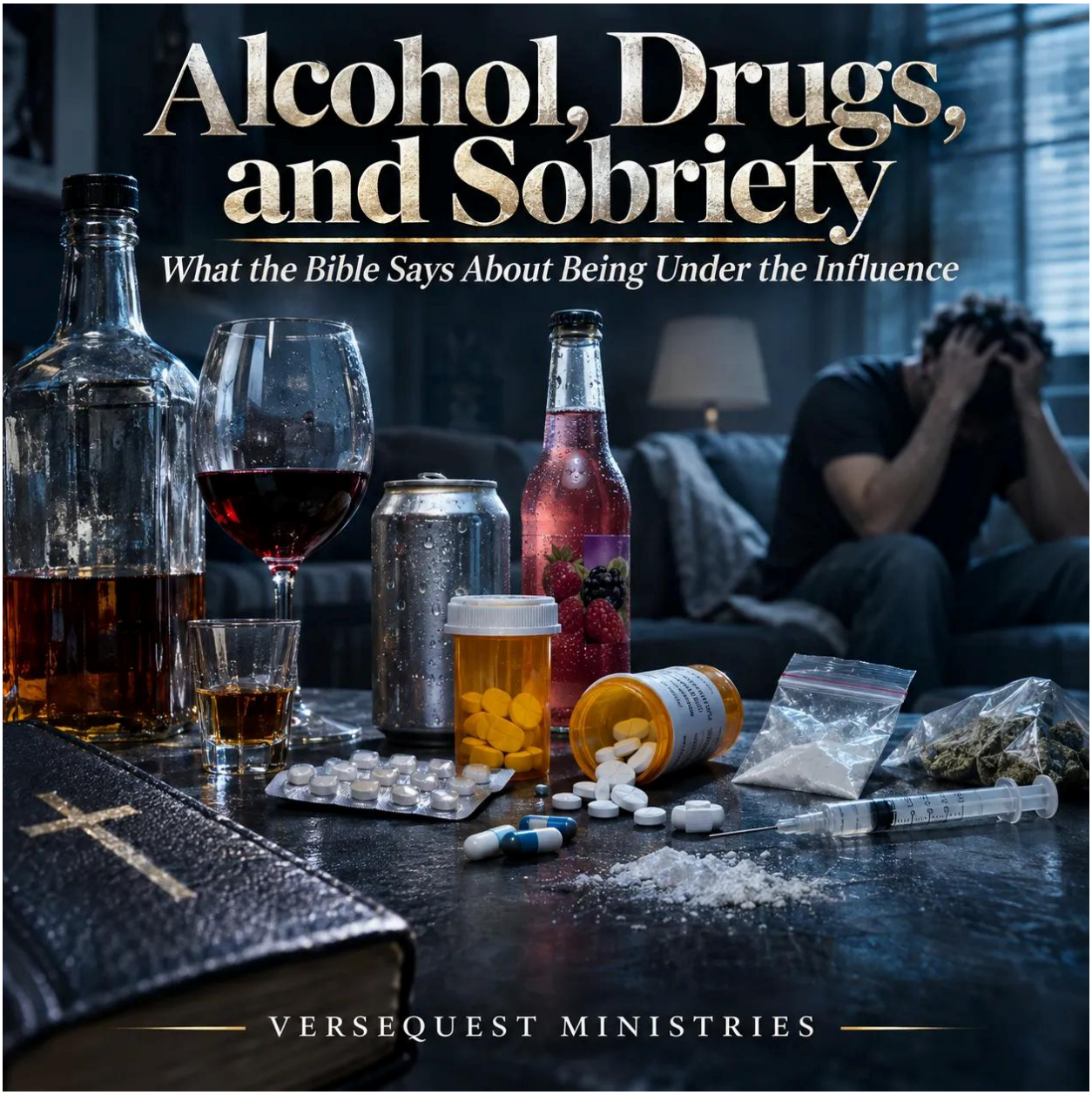
Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety

What the Bible Says About Being Under the Influence

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries




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Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety
What the Bible Says About Being Under the Influence

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Proclaiming the Word of God, rightly divided.

King James Bible — 2 Timothy 2:15

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Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety

What the Bible Says About Being Under the Influence

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Introduction — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety

What the Bible Says About Being Under the Influence

There are some subjects that a preacher can address without anybody getting particularly excited, and then there are subjects that cause people to sit up, straighten their collars, and suddenly become deeply concerned about Christian liberty. Alcohol happens to be one of them. Mention drunkenness, and somebody will remind you that Jesus turned water into wine. Mention the dangers of drinking, and somebody else will explain that he only has one or two occasionally. Bring up the bottle, and before long, half the discussion is no longer about what God said but about what somebody wants permission to keep doing. Well, the Bible was not written to serve as a defense attorney for the flesh. It was written to reveal the truth, expose sin, instruct believers, and point sinners to Jesus Christ. Proverbs 20:1 declares, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” That warning was true when Solomon wrote it, and it has not expired because modern society has learned to put expensive labels on bottles.

We have already devoted considerable attention this week to the subject of drinking in another series, and I realize that some may wonder why we are returning to the subject so soon. If the timing gives anyone the impression that we are singling out particular individuals or deliberately picking on those who have different convictions concerning alcohol, I sincerely apologize for that impression. That is not the purpose. But I will not apologize for opening the King James Bible and addressing matters that are destroying people's lives. This series is considerably broader than the previous examination. We are going beyond the bottle to address recreational drugs, marijuana, prescription medication, addiction, physical dependence, impaired driving, the responsibility of Christian liberty, and the biblical meaning of sobriety. We will also examine distinctions that deserve careful attention, including the difference between legitimate medical treatment and deliberate intoxication. There are questions we did not fully address before, and there are people who desperately need those questions answered. Sometimes a subject deserves another examination because the suffering surrounding it is far greater than the public conversation suggests.

There is something else I want understood from the beginning. People do not always know what a pastor sees, hears, and carries in the course of ministering to others. I have been inside homes where alcohol was destroying the peace of a family. I have been involved in prison ministry and witnessed the consequences of decisions made under the influence. I have been in hospitals where the aftermath of drunk driving was no longer an argument about personal freedom but a terrible reality involving injured people and suffering families. I know that there are people struggling privately with alcohol, drugs, dependency, and

habits they desperately wish they could overcome. Some of those struggles are known only to a handful of people. Others are buried beneath an outward appearance of respectability. I am not going to identify anyone, expose private conversations, or turn another person's suffering into public entertainment. But I cannot ignore what I know simply because somebody who is not struggling with these things finds the subject inconvenient. **The people who need help are not always the loudest people in the discussion. Sometimes they are the quiet ones who have been praying for somebody to address the very thing that is destroying them.**

And that brings us to something Christians desperately need to understand: **not every message is about you.** If you do not drink, praise God. If you have never experimented with recreational drugs, be thankful. If you have never experienced addiction, you have much to be grateful for. But there may be somebody sitting beside you who is fighting a battle you know absolutely nothing about. There may be a husband struggling to remain sober, a wife quietly watching her family fall apart, a young person beginning to experiment with substances, or a believer terrified that another relapse will destroy what little confidence his family has left in him. A Christian who reads a warning against drunkenness and immediately becomes offended because he occasionally enjoys a glass of wine has perhaps overlooked the suffering of the person who cannot safely touch another drop. Romans 14:21 declares, “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.” The Christian life involves considering somebody besides the person looking back at us in the mirror.

We are also going to be careful about what the Bible actually says. I have no intention of manufacturing commandments that God never gave. Scripture does not explicitly condemn every instance of alcohol consumption, and pretending otherwise does not make our position stronger. The Bible records wine in different settings, including ordinary life and particular medicinal uses. Paul instructed Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities. We will not twist that instruction into permission for recreational drunkenness, but neither will we pretend it is absent from Scripture. Likewise, legitimate pain management, surgery, anesthesia, psychiatric treatment, and properly prescribed medications must not be recklessly equated with abusing drugs to become intoxicated. A person receiving necessary medical treatment is not automatically living in rebellion against God. But a prescription does not make deliberate misuse righteous, and the existence of legitimate medicine does not provide permission to turn the medicine cabinet into a private drugstore for chemical entertainment. We are going to make the distinctions Scripture requires, not the distinctions somebody's appetite would prefer.

However, nobody should mistake careful biblical interpretation for a willingness to compromise with drunkenness. The Bible is not uncertain about that sin. Ephesians 5:18 declares, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” Galatians 5:19–21 places drunkenness among the works of the flesh. First Peter 5:8 commands believers to “Be sober, be vigilant.” First Corinthians 6:12 declares, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” Those verses are not suggestions from a religious committee. They are inspired Scripture. They establish that Christian liberty must never become an excuse for surrendering judgment, indulging the flesh, or allowing a destructive habit to gain mastery over the believer. A man who insists that he has complete control over his drinking while becoming furious at the suggestion of giving it up ought to examine what has made the subject so important to him. **If you do not need the drink, why do you fight so hard to keep it?** That question deserves more than another rehearsed explanation about personal freedom.

There is also a great deal of nonsense being circulated concerning recreational drugs. Marijuana becomes legal in another jurisdiction, and suddenly somebody announces that the moral question has been settled. A substance is called natural, and apparently that is supposed to make every possible use of it wise. Another person claims that getting high helps him relax, improves his outlook, or makes life's difficulties easier to endure. Well, there are plenty of natural substances in this world that will injure or kill you, and there is no shortage of foolish things that produce pleasant sensations before presenting the bill. The fact that something feels good does not establish that it is good. The fact that a government permits something does not establish that God approves of every use. The believer is commanded to exercise sobriety, self-control, vigilance, and wisdom. Those responsibilities do not disappear because society has developed a more fashionable vocabulary for intoxication. **You do not become spiritually enlightened by deliberately clouding the mind God commanded you to keep sober.**

But there is another side of this subject that demands just as much seriousness. It is easy to condemn an alcoholic when you have never sat beside somebody who hates the bottle and still struggles to stop drinking. It is easy to ridicule a drug addict when you have never witnessed the terrible grip that dependence can exert upon a person's life. There are people who have sincerely trusted Jesus Christ, experienced substantial periods of sobriety, and later fallen back into destructive habits. Their failures must not be excused, but neither should we automatically declare that every struggling believer is lost. Salvation is not obtained by quitting alcohol, throwing away drugs, or successfully completing a treatment program. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is by grace through faith, not works. The believer's eternal security rests upon Jesus Christ, not upon his ability to maintain

perfect conduct. Nevertheless, grace does not turn drunkenness into righteousness, and forgiveness does not eliminate the responsibility to seek genuine deliverance. **A man struggling to escape bondage does not need somebody telling him that the chains are harmless, but neither does he need somebody standing over him announcing that he is beyond the mercy of God.**

We will also address the practical responsibilities involved in overcoming addiction. Repentance matters. Confession matters. Honest accountability matters. Avoiding companions and circumstances that encourage relapse matters. Christian fellowship, faithful pastoral care, and the encouragement of other believers matter. Appropriate medical treatment matters as well, especially because severe withdrawal from alcohol and certain medications can be dangerous and even life-threatening. Nobody should confuse a reckless attempt to abandon necessary treatment with a demonstration of superior faith. The Lord who commands wisdom has not forbidden His children from obtaining legitimate medical assistance. At the same time, medical explanations must never become convenient excuses for dishonesty, abuse, neglect, or deliberate misconduct. We will neither dismiss bodily realities nor remove moral responsibility from decisions that Scripture clearly condemns. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore someone overtaken in a fault "in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." That verse leaves very little room for either arrogant condemnation or sentimental approval of destructive sin.

And we cannot examine this subject without considering the people who suffer because of somebody else's behavior. There are wives who have prayed for years over husbands caught in drinking habits. There are husbands who have watched alcohol or drugs gradually destroy the women they love. There are children who have learned to distinguish between a sober parent and an intoxicated parent by the sound of footsteps outside the bedroom. There are families whose finances have disappeared into destructive habits and whose confidence has been shattered by promises repeatedly broken. There are innocent motorists who never agreed to participate in somebody else's decision to drive impaired. These people matter. Their suffering matters. Their protection matters. And sometimes the person most in need of biblical encouragement is not the one defending his right to indulge but the one quietly enduring the consequences. Proverbs 23:29 asks, "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions?" The answer is not always limited to the person drinking. **The bottle may have one owner, but it can leave an entire household paying the bill.**

The purpose of these ten essays is therefore much greater than winning an argument about whether someone may have a drink with dinner. We are going to examine what Scripture

teaches concerning the bottle, the influence of drugs, the danger of impaired judgment, the responsibilities of parents, the example of Christian leaders, the suffering of families, the reality of addiction, and the necessity of a sober mind. We will confront the person who hides fleshly indulgence beneath the language of Christian liberty. We will also confront the self-righteous individual who treats every struggling sinner as an opportunity to display his own superiority. The Bible condemns drunkenness, but it also commands charity, restoration, and compassion. Truth and love are not enemies. A preacher who refuses to warn against sin has abandoned part of his responsibility. But a Christian who enjoys condemning people more than helping them has misunderstood the purpose of biblical correction. **The objective is not to win an argument against somebody holding a bottle. The objective is to bring the truth of God to people whose lives may be destroyed if nobody bothers to warn them.**

Finally, let us understand where this series is going. It does not end with the bottle, the drug, the prison cell, the hospital room, or the broken promise. It ends with the command to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Christian life was never designed to revolve around discovering how much intoxication a believer can defend without violating an explicit prohibition. It was designed to glorify Jesus Christ through faith, obedience, wisdom, self-control, and godly conduct. Titus 2:11–12 declares that the grace of God brings salvation and teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, living "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." That is the standard we are going to examine. If these essays cause somebody to reconsider a questionable habit, praise God. If they help a struggling believer seek deliverance, praise God. If they encourage a suffering family, protect a young person, or remind another Christian to consider the welfare of a weaker brother, then this examination has served a worthwhile purpose. **Not every warning is an accusation against the person reading it. Sometimes it is God's truth arriving in time to help somebody who has been suffering in silence. And if one person finds the courage to seek help, one family begins to recover, or one life is spared from destruction, then this is a subject worth preaching about.**

1 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — Wine Is a Mocker: The Bottle Makes Promises It Cannot Keep

Key Passage: Proverbs 20:1 — "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

The Bible does not open its warning about strong drink with a committee meeting, a public opinion survey, or a discussion about what the latest generation considers socially acceptable. It opens with a verdict. “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). There is enough truth packed into that one verse to empty a thousand liquor advertisements of their foolish promises. The world has spent fortunes teaching people to associate alcohol with happiness, sophistication, friendship, romance, success, and relaxation. God identifies a mocker, a raging influence, and a deceived individual who lacks wisdom. Somebody is lying about the product, and it is not the Author of the Bible. The liquor industry can dress up its merchandise with expensive labels, polished bottles, and photographs of smiling people, but a rattlesnake does not become a household pet because somebody puts a ribbon around its neck. The contents of the bottle remain what they are, regardless of the advertising campaign wrapped around them.

There is something remarkable about the way people defend a substance that has caused so much destruction. A man can read about a drunk driver killing an innocent family, hear about a marriage destroyed by alcoholism, watch a relative lose everything through addiction, and still announce that he has the matter completely under control. He is different, naturally. He knows his limits. He can handle it. He only drinks occasionally. He never intends to become one of those unfortunate people. That is an impressive collection of assurances from a creature who cannot guarantee that he will be alive tomorrow. Proverbs 27:1 declares, “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” Yet here stands a man confidently predicting the future behavior of his appetite. He cannot control tomorrow's weather, tomorrow's circumstances, or tomorrow's temptations, but he is absolutely certain that a habit capable of enslaving other men will never gain any mastery over him. The Bible has a word for such confidence when it is founded upon deception. It calls it foolishness.

This subject is not merely an argument conducted between Christians over whether somebody may have a glass of wine with dinner. There are homes where children have learned to recognize the footsteps of an intoxicated father. There are women who have spent years praying that their husbands would come home sober. There are prisoners who can trace the worst decision of their lives to an evening when their judgment was surrendered to a bottle. There are hospital rooms where families have faced the consequences of somebody else's drunkenness. I have been in homes, prisons, and hospitals where the consequences were not theoretical, and I have seen enough to know that the final chapter of a drinking habit rarely resembles its advertising. The Bible does not require anyone to invent frightening stories to strengthen its warnings. Proverbs 23 provides a description so accurate that it might as well have been written beside the hospital bed of

a drunkard yesterday morning. The world advertises the beginning of the experience. God reveals what waits at the end.

1. God's Verdict Against the Mocker

The book of Proverbs belongs to the wisdom literature given to Israel, and much of its instruction is associated with Solomon, the king who understood something about both wisdom and the ruin that follows disobedience. Its immediate historical setting must be respected, but nobody needs to pretend that drunkenness became harmless when the Church Age began. The same human flesh that sought pleasure in Solomon's day is still operating in the present generation. The bottle has changed its packaging, transportation has improved, and the advertising has become more expensive, but the old nature has not received an upgrade. Proverbs 20:1 is a declaration of moral wisdom, not a ceremonial ordinance belonging exclusively to Israel under the law. The warning applies because the danger remains. A man who believes he can escape a biblical principle simply because he lives under grace has confused the finished work of Jesus Christ with permission to act like a fool. Grace delivers the believer from condemnation; it does not turn foolishness into wisdom.

Notice the three expressions in Proverbs 20:1. First, “Wine is a mocker.” A mocker makes light of something serious, and there is nothing quite like the false confidence that intoxication produces. Second, “strong drink is raging.” The description is not tranquility, peace, or godly contentment. It is something capable of producing disorder, conflict, and uncontrolled behavior. Third, “whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” The warning identifies deception as the central danger. A man can believe that drinking makes him courageous while everybody else watches him become reckless. He can believe that it makes him entertaining while his family becomes embarrassed. He can believe that it relieves his troubles while it steadily multiplies them. Sin has an extraordinary ability to convince a man that he is succeeding while everything around him is falling apart. The trouble with a deceived man is that he rarely introduces himself by announcing that he has been deceived. He ordinarily believes he knows something that everybody else has failed to understand.

There is no need to manufacture a commandment that says every biblical reference to wine represents the same substance, circumstances, or use. The Bible contains historical references, ordinary references, medicinal references, and unmistakable condemnations of drunkenness. Those distinctions deserve careful treatment. But notice what some people do with that observation. They discover that a subject requires careful biblical interpretation and immediately conclude that all warnings may be safely set aside. That is about as sensible as discovering that fire can cook dinner and deciding it cannot burn

down the house. The proper question is not whether an argument can be constructed to excuse some particular amount of drinking. The proper question is whether the conduct demonstrates wisdom, sobriety, godliness, and mastery over one's appetites. Proverbs does not merely warn against embarrassing behavior after intoxication. It warns against being deceived by the very thing that promises pleasure. When a Christian spends more time defending the bottle than examining his Bible, his priorities deserve serious investigation.

2. The Questions the Liquor Advertisement Never Answers

Proverbs 23:29 opens with six questions: “Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?” What a remarkable advertisement that would make! Imagine the television commercial beginning with a beautiful sunset, a polished table, and an expensive bottle, followed by the announcer asking who would like sorrow, arguments, foolish speech, unexplained injuries, and bloodshot eyes. The marketing department would probably have a nervous breakdown before the commercial reached its second sentence. Yet those are the very matters God places before the reader. Notice that the questions are not confined to physical sickness. They include misery, conflict, speech, injuries, and visible evidence of excess. The consequences reach into a man's relationships, reputation, judgment, and body. Scripture is describing more than an unpleasant morning after a night of drinking. It is exposing an entire pattern of destruction that the world would rather keep outside the camera's view. God asks about the things people are left holding after the bottle is empty.

The answer follows immediately in Proverbs 23:30: “They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.” There is the individual who lingers, returns, searches, and makes drinking a continuing occupation. The verse does not describe a man accidentally passing a bottle on his way to work. It describes people deliberately pursuing the experience. Their time, attention, and appetite are directed toward it. The expression “tarry long” is especially revealing because alcohol often takes more than the money paid for it. It consumes evenings, disrupts mornings, damages responsibilities, and gradually reorganizes a person's life around the next opportunity to drink. A man may claim that alcohol is only a small part of his life while continually making arrangements to accommodate it. He knows exactly when the store closes, what the restaurant serves, and where the next gathering will provide drinks, but somehow cannot remember when he last opened his Bible. That is a rather peculiar arrangement of priorities for somebody who insists the bottle means nothing to him.

The world is wonderfully skilled at presenting temptation without displaying its consequences. It shows the wedding toast but not the argument afterward. It shows the

young couple laughing beside the pool but not the frightened child listening through the bedroom wall. It shows the man relaxing after work but not the employer explaining why he no longer has a job. It shows the celebration but not the courtroom. Of course, not every drink produces every catastrophe, and nobody needs to make that dishonest claim. The point is that an attractive beginning cannot guarantee a harmless ending. Proverbs does not say every individual will experience the identical consequences. It warns that the pursuit of intoxicating drink contains genuine danger and deception. The liquor advertisement sells a carefully selected moment. The Bible examines the entire transaction. The price printed on the bottle is merely the price of admission. The final bill, when drinking becomes destructive, may arrive at the family table, the hospital, the jail, or the cemetery.

3. The Serpent in the Cup

Proverbs 23:31 declares, “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.” The warning deliberately draws attention to the appearance of the wine. Its color is attractive, its presentation inviting, and its movement in the cup part of the temptation. God is not discussing a container of poisonous chemicals conveniently marked with a skull and crossed bones. He is describing something appealing enough to capture a man's attention. In the immediate context, the warning concerns the wine pursued by those who tarry long at drinking. That context matters, and there is no excuse for twisting it merely to win an argument. Nevertheless, the command is forceful. The reader is warned against being captivated by the very attraction that leads to ruin. Sin seldom introduces itself with a complete disclosure of its intentions. It ordinarily arrives looking respectable, pleasant, and manageable. The devil does not need to make the trap ugly when he can persuade a man to admire the bait.

The next verse reveals what the attractive presentation concealed: “At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder” (Proverbs 23:32). Three words deserve particular attention: “At the last.” There is the part of the story the world keeps overlooking. The beginning may be pleasant. The company may be enjoyable. The taste may become familiar. The occasion may appear innocent. But the wisdom of Scripture demands that a man examine where a practice can lead, not merely how it feels when he begins. A serpent does not need to announce its intentions before striking. Its beautiful markings provide no assurance that its venom is harmless. The biblical comparison exposes the danger of trusting appearances. The beverage that appears inviting may become an instrument of misery when pursued into drunkenness and dependency. A man who judges the serpent by

its color while ignoring its fangs has mistaken appreciation for wisdom. There is no particular intelligence in admiring the creature that is preparing to bite you.

The serpent's bite also exposes the progressive nature of destructive appetites. What begins as an occasional indulgence can become a regular expectation, then a practiced habit, and eventually a demand that becomes difficult to resist. That progression is not inevitable for every person who consumes alcohol, but it is real enough that Scripture's warnings should never be dismissed. James 1:14–15 describes the general process of temptation: a man is drawn away by his own lust and enticed, lust conceives, and sin brings forth death. James is not giving a technical explanation of chemical dependence; he is explaining the spiritual danger of allowing desire to govern conduct. The principle is clear. Sin does not remain harmless because it began in a small form. Nobody should expect the consequences of an appetite to remain permanently limited by the promises made when the appetite first appeared. The serpent does not become less dangerous because its owner has learned to handle it casually. Familiarity with danger is not the same thing as victory over it.

4. When the Eyes Wander and the Heart Starts Talking

Proverbs 23:33 continues the description: “Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.” Here the consequences move from the physical body into moral conduct. Intoxication can weaken restraint, cloud judgment, and encourage behavior that sober individuals might otherwise recognize as shameful or dangerous. The reference to strange women is particularly serious in the moral instruction of Proverbs, where sexual temptation repeatedly appears as a threat to faithfulness and wisdom. The verse does not claim every intoxicated man becomes an adulterer. It demonstrates that drunkenness can expose a person to temptations and decisions from which sound judgment would ordinarily restrain him. Proverbs 6:27 asks, “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” The same fellow who insists that a little drunken entertainment is harmless may discover that his marriage was worth considerably more than the evening he sacrificed it for. There is nothing sophisticated about losing a faithful wife because somebody found the bottom of a bottle more interesting than the marriage covenant.

Notice also the second part of Proverbs 23:33: “and thine heart shall utter perverse things.” Scripture moves from what the eyes behold to what the heart expresses. The words of an intoxicated person may reveal foolishness, cruelty, obscenity, arrogance, or recklessness. Christ declared in Matthew 12:34, “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Alcohol does not create every sinful desire that appears during intoxication, but it can weaken the restraint that ordinarily keeps sinful impulses from becoming words and

actions. A man may spend the following morning apologizing for statements he cannot completely remember. He might explain that he did not mean them, and perhaps his sober judgment genuinely rejects them. Nevertheless, spoken words cannot always be recalled simply because the speaker regrets them. A cruel remark can damage a relationship long after the alcohol has left the body. What a remarkable bargain: a man pays money for something that makes him say foolish things, then spends the following day trying to convince everybody that the foolish things were not really his. There are less expensive ways to embarrass yourself.

Proverbs 23:34 gives another extraordinary picture: “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.” Imagine somebody lying down to sleep at the top of a ship's mast while the vessel moves through dangerous waters. There is no sensible reason to choose that position. The height, movement, instability, and risk make it a place where alertness is essential. Yet the drunkard behaves like somebody who has lost the ability to recognize obvious danger. Proverbs 31:4–5 likewise warns kings and princes against drinking in a manner that causes them to forget the law and pervert judgment. Those verses concern rulers and the administration of justice, but the principle reaches beyond the palace. A father exercises judgment in his home, an employer carries responsibility for employees, and a driver must make decisions affecting other lives. Sobriety matters wherever responsibility exists. The tragedy of drunkenness is not merely that a man becomes foolish. It is that his foolishness may place innocent people beneath a falling mast.

5. Beaten, Bleeding, and Looking for Another Drink

The description reaches its terrible conclusion in 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.” What an astonishing picture of the destructive power of intoxication! The man has been struck and beaten, yet he speaks of having felt nothing. His senses have been dulled, his ability to recognize danger diminished, and his condition made worse by the very substance he pursued for enjoyment. The connection with the earlier question about “wounds without cause” is unmistakable. A person may suffer injuries while intoxicated without knowing how they happened or understanding their seriousness. That is not bravery, toughness, or evidence that he can handle alcohol. It is a dangerous loss of awareness. A man who cannot recognize his own injuries has not achieved some remarkable level of freedom. He has surrendered the very faculties God gave him to recognize danger and protect himself. Calling that condition entertainment does not make it entertaining.

But the most disturbing words come at the very end: “I will seek it yet again.” There is the cycle in one sentence. The injuries have not taught him. The humiliation has not stopped him. The consequences have not extinguished the desire. He awakens from the miserable experience and begins looking toward another. Scripture does not provide a modern medical classification of addiction in this verse, but it describes behavior that anyone familiar with destructive drinking can recognize immediately. The very thing that harmed the man remains the thing he intends to pursue. Sin has performed its little trick of making the source of misery appear to be the promised escape from misery. There are men who have lost employment, destroyed relationships, damaged their bodies, and spent time behind prison walls because of drinking, yet still experience powerful cravings for alcohol. The person who has never known that struggle should be exceedingly careful about boasting of his own strength. It takes very little wisdom to condemn a fallen man from a comfortable chair. It takes considerably more to recognize the danger before becoming like him.

The Bible never instructs Christians to approve of drunkenness simply because overcoming it is difficult. Neither does it command us to abandon a struggling person because he has failed repeatedly. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore one overtaken in a fault “in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” There is room for plain rebuke, honest confession, genuine repentance, and practical help without treating the individual as beyond the reach of God's mercy. Some people require medical supervision to stop drinking safely because severe alcohol withdrawal can be dangerous and even life-threatening. Seeking appropriate treatment does not deny the power of God any more than obtaining treatment for a serious injury denies that God heals. A Christian should not disguise his responsibility behind excuses, but neither should another believer mistake cruelty for courage. The man bound by alcohol needs truth strong enough to expose his sin and Christian charity serious enough to help him pursue freedom. Preaching against the bottle is necessary. Reaching for the man who is drowning in it is necessary too.

6. The Party That Lasts Until the Household Falls Apart

Isaiah 5:11 pronounces another warning: “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!” Isaiah's immediate message concerns Judah and the sins that would bring divine judgment upon the nation. We must not transfer every national warning against Israel and Judah directly to the Church as though the covenants were interchangeable. Nevertheless, the moral condition being condemned is plainly revealed. Here are people who organize their day around drinking, pursuing the appetite from morning until night. Verse 12 continues with musical instruments and wine at their feasts, but adds the devastating indictment: “but

they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands." Their lives are filled with entertainment while their attention to God has disappeared. There is nothing inherently wrong with music, meals, or ordinary enjoyment, but there is something dreadfully wrong with a life so occupied with pleasure that the Creator is ignored. A man can keep the party going while his soul is starving.

The consequences of destructive drinking become particularly bitter when they enter the household. Ephesians 5:25 commands, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." That is sacrificial love, not selfish indulgence. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers not to provoke their children to wrath, but to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. First Timothy 5:8 speaks sternly concerning the responsibility to provide for one's own household. How does a man square those commands with continually wasting the family income, frightening his children, humiliating his wife, or neglecting his responsibilities because he prefers drinking? He cannot square them, and the Bible never gives him permission to try. Not every drinker neglects his family, but the man whose drinking has brought neglect and suffering into his home cannot defend himself by pointing to somebody else who appears unaffected. The liquor store collects its money when the purchase is made. The household may continue paying for that purchase long after the customer has forgotten it.

There is another generation watching, and that makes the matter more serious still. Children learn from what their parents practice, not merely from the rules they announce. A father can spend fifteen minutes lecturing his son about the dangers of alcohol and then spend the evening demonstrating how important drinking has become to him. That is not a particularly convincing sermon. The boy may forget every sentence of the lecture while remembering the example for the rest of his life. Of course, children make their own moral choices, and parents are not automatically responsible for every sinful decision an adult child eventually makes. But parental example carries tremendous influence, and Scripture repeatedly stresses the importance of instructing the young in righteousness. Proverbs 22:6 declares, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." A household should teach children that godliness is worth more than amusement and sound judgment more than chemical pleasure. What good is a father who can explain the finer distinctions of his favorite whiskey but cannot explain the gospel to his own children?

7. God Is Not Mocked: The Harvest Nobody Wanted to Reap

Habakkuk 2:15 declares, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!" In its prophetic setting, Habakkuk 2 pronounces judgment against the proud and oppressive

power whose violence, greed, and wickedness God would not overlook. The warning concerning making another person drunk exposes the deliberate use of intoxication to bring humiliation and shame. That immediate context must be respected, but the evil principle remains plain enough for any generation to understand. It is wicked to exploit another person's impaired condition or deliberately encourage intoxication for some shameful purpose. Consider the individual who continually pressures others to drink, mocks somebody for refusing, or deliberately encourages an already intoxicated person to continue. He may call it friendship, hospitality, or having a good time. Scripture supplies a much less flattering description of the heart that desires another person's humiliation. A true friend does not need to make somebody less capable of judgment in order to enjoy his company. There is something terribly wrong when the bottle becomes more welcome than the conscience.

Galatians 6:7 declares, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” This is New Testament instruction given through the apostle Paul to believers in the churches of Galatia. It is not a commandment requiring a Christian to earn salvation through good behavior. Salvation is the gift of God, received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not a reward for avoiding particular sins. Nevertheless, the believer's eternal security does not cancel the consequences of fleshly conduct. The Christian who sows to the flesh should not be surprised when corruption appears in the harvest. A man may be forgiven for drunkenness and still face the consequences of a destroyed relationship, a criminal conviction, a damaged reputation, or serious harm to his body. Forgiveness does not turn yesterday's foolishness into yesterday's wisdom. God's mercy is wonderful, but nobody should presume upon that mercy as an excuse for deliberately planting another crop of sin. The harvest does not become imaginary merely because the farmer has decided he no longer likes what he planted.

There comes a point when a man must stop debating what he can get away with and begin asking what he ought to surrender. First Corinthians 6:12 declares, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” There is the searching question for every person defending a questionable habit. Has it gained power over you? Can you refuse it without resentment? Can you walk away without spending the next hour explaining why you should not have to walk away? Can you give it up when obedience, testimony, responsibility, or another person's welfare makes surrender the wise choice? Nobody should mistake mere abstinence for salvation, and nobody should pretend that becoming sober automatically makes a person righteous before God. But the believer who has been bought with a price ought to take seriously anything that threatens to master his conduct. A man who boasts

about his liberty while obeying every demand of his appetite has an unusual definition of freedom. When the habit begins issuing orders, it is time to examine who is serving whom.

Conclusion — The Bottle Never Tells You How the Story Ends

Return once more to Proverbs 23 and consider the remarkable progression of the passage. It begins with questions about sorrow, contention, foolish speech, injuries, and redness of eyes. It identifies people who linger over wine and deliberately seek it. It describes the attractive appearance of the drink and then warns that, at the last, it bites like a serpent. It exposes compromised judgment, perverse speech, dangerous disorientation, physical injuries, and a man so overcome by his appetite that he announces his intention to seek the same destructive experience again. That is not a collection of unrelated warnings. It is a complete biblical portrait of a dangerous progression. The reader is taken from the attraction to the consequences, from the apparent pleasure to the miserable repetition. The world's advertisements could never afford to tell that entire story. The Bible tells it without charging anybody a penny. The serpent's appearance occupies one verse, but the consequences fill the passage. There is wisdom in noticing where God places the emphasis.

Somebody reading these words may have never been drunk and may have no intention of becoming so. That is an excellent reason to take the warning seriously before trouble begins. Somebody else may be defending an occasional drink while insisting that the Bible has no authority to question his judgment. The challenge is to examine that defense honestly under the whole counsel of Scripture rather than searching for isolated verses that appear to provide convenient permission. Another reader may already know the misery described in Proverbs 23 because the struggle has entered his own home, marriage, employment, or body. There is no profit in pretending the problem is smaller than it is. Repentance requires honesty, and genuine recovery requires more than another promise made during an evening of regret. Seek the Lord, acknowledge the danger, abandon the excuses, and obtain the practical assistance necessary to pursue sobriety safely. There is no honor in protecting the appearance of independence while a destructive habit continues taking everything important. A man does not become weak by admitting that the bottle has gained a hold upon him. He demonstrates foolishness by insisting that the chains are merely decorations.

The answer to sin begins with Jesus Christ, not with a bottle being emptied into a sink. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” A man can stop drinking and remain lost, just as a saved man may struggle against a sinful habit without losing the eternal life he received through faith in Christ. But the grace that saves us is no

invitation to remain willingly enslaved to the flesh. Titus 2:11–12 teaches that the grace of God brings salvation and instructs believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. The world offers intoxication as relief from life's difficulties. God calls His children to walk in wisdom and depend upon Him rather than surrender their faculties to an appetite. So remember the verdict when the advertisements begin making their promises. Remember the family, the testimony, the consequences, and the serpent waiting at the end of the passage. Proverbs 20:1 has already settled the essential question: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” The bottle may promise a good time, but it never promises to return what it takes.

2 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — Did Jesus Turn Water Into Wine? Stop Using Scripture to Excuse the Bottle

Key Passage: John 2:1–11 — “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.” (John 2:11)

There is hardly a subject in the Bible where people suddenly become more interested in quoting Scripture than when somebody questions their drinking habits. A man who cannot remember where the book of Habakkuk is located can usually find John chapter 2 without consulting the table of contents. Ask him about justification, sanctification, the judgment seat of Christ, or the difference between Israel and the Church, and he may need a little assistance. But mention alcohol, and suddenly he becomes an authority on the marriage at Cana. “Jesus turned water into wine!” comes the announcement, delivered with all the confidence of somebody who believes he has just settled two thousand years of biblical instruction with six words. Well, the Lord Jesus Christ certainly turned water into wine. The Bible says He did, and nobody has any business denying what the Book plainly records. But there is a considerable difference between believing the miracle and using the miracle as a permission slip for an appetite. Before anybody appoints the Son of God honorary spokesman for the liquor industry, perhaps we ought to find out what He was actually doing at that wedding.

John 2:1–11 records the first miracle of the Lord Jesus Christ, performed at a marriage in Cana of Galilee. The passage concerns His divine power, the manifestation of His glory, and the response of His disciples to the miracle. It does not record Christ teaching a class on recreational drinking, establishing a drinking standard for New Testament churches, or explaining how many glasses a Christian may consume before he crosses the line into sin.

Those questions may be examined elsewhere in Scripture, but they must not be forced into a passage that addresses something entirely different. The same Bible that records water becoming wine also declares that wine is a mocker, warns against its deceptive attraction, condemns drunkenness, and commands believers to be sober. A man cannot honestly claim to respect the authority of John chapter 2 while treating Proverbs chapter 23 and Ephesians chapter 5 like embarrassing relatives who should not be invited to the discussion. God did not write one portion of Scripture to excuse disobedience to another. The entire Book deserves a hearing, not merely the verses that flatter the reader's preferences.

This study will not depend upon pretending that the word *wine* always means unfermented grape juice, nor upon the equally foolish assumption that every biblical reference to wine describes intoxicating liquor being consumed for pleasure. Scripture must determine its own meaning through context, usage, circumstances, and direct instruction. We will examine the wedding at Cana, the language of the passage, the medicinal recommendation given to Timothy, the recognition of wine in the Psalms, and the unmistakable commands concerning drunkenness, sobriety, Christian liberty, and the welfare of other believers. If Scripture says something favorable about wine in a particular setting, we will acknowledge it. If Scripture condemns the misuse of wine, we will acknowledge that too. The object is not to win an argument by hiding inconvenient verses beneath the furniture. The object is to discover what God has actually said and then submit to it. A Bible believer must never become so determined to defend a personal habit that he begins handling the word of God like a dishonest lawyer handling evidence.

1. The Marriage at Cana Was a Miracle, Not a Liquor Advertisement

John 2:1 begins, “And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there.” The next verse explains that Jesus and His disciples were also invited. During the celebration, the wine ran out, and Mary brought the matter to Christ's attention. Jesus answered, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come” (John 2:4). Mary then instructed the servants, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” That statement deserves more attention than it usually receives from people defending their drinking preferences. Here is a command to obey Christ, not to twist His actions into support for whatever a person wishes to do. The servants obeyed when Jesus instructed them to fill six stone waterpots with water, vessels associated with the Jewish manner of purification. The setting is Israel during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, before His death, burial, and resurrection. The details belong to a real historical event, and the miracle must be understood there before anybody begins applying it to modern Christian conduct.

John 2:7 records the Lord's instruction: “Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.” There was no room for somebody to improve the contents with an ingredient quietly added afterward. Jesus then instructed the servants to draw out and carry the contents to the governor of the feast. When the governor tasted what had been drawn, he discovered wine of exceptional quality. The servants knew where it had come from, but the governor did not. That distinction is important because John deliberately records witnesses who understood the miraculous circumstances. Jesus did not perform an elaborate ceremony, summon professional assistance, or conduct an experiment with natural fermentation. He commanded, and the transformation occurred. The miracle demonstrated divine authority over the created order. If a man reads this passage and comes away impressed principally by the possibility of enjoying an alcoholic beverage, he has managed to walk through a display of divine glory and spend his entire visit admiring the refreshments.

The Holy Ghost supplies the stated purpose in John 2:11: “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.” There is the inspired explanation. The miracle manifested Christ's glory and strengthened the disciples' belief. John's Gospel repeatedly presents the works of Jesus as evidence of His identity, and John 20:31 declares that these things were written so readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have life through His name. That is the larger theological purpose governing the account. The miracle is not meaningless because wine was involved, nor should the nature of its contents be denied simply to avoid an uncomfortable discussion. Nevertheless, the meaning of the miracle is infinitely greater than the beverage served at the wedding. The servants witnessed the power of the Creator. The disciples beheld His glory. Two thousand years later, some readers are still trying to make the principal lesson about what they may order at a restaurant. That is not careful Bible exposition. That is an appetite attempting to write the sermon.

2. Wine Means Wine: Let the Context Do Its Work

One of the most common mistakes in this controversy is the insistence that every appearance of the word *wine* must carry one identical meaning under every circumstance. The Bible itself will not permit that kind of careless handling. Isaiah 65:8 speaks of “the new wine” being found “in the cluster,” demonstrating that Scripture can speak of wine in connection with grapes before any completed fermentation process. Genesis 40:11 describes the chief butler taking grapes, pressing them into Pharaoh's cup, and giving the cup to Pharaoh. Other passages clearly associate wine with intoxication, impaired judgment, and dangerous excess. Proverbs 20:1 and Proverbs 23:29–35 leave no doubt about those consequences. Therefore, it is unsound to assume that every biblical

occurrence describes the same stage, preparation, strength, or use of a grape product. But context must establish the distinction. A preacher has no authority to announce that every favorable reference means unfermented juice merely because he dislikes the consequences of the alternative. Neither does the drinker possess authority to announce that every favorable reference proves recreational alcohol consumption acceptable. Scripture is the judge, and neither side gets to bribe the jury.

Consider John 2:10, where the governor declares, “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.” Some readers seize upon “well drunk” and immediately announce that the wedding guests were already intoxicated and that Jesus supplied additional intoxicating liquor. But the governor is describing a customary order of serving wine, not issuing a medical report on the condition of every guest at Cana. The expression establishes that drinking had occurred; it does not establish universal drunkenness. Neither does the passage explicitly tell us the precise alcoholic strength or fermentation status of the wine Jesus made. One may argue about those matters, but the argument must not be presented as an explicit statement of Scripture when the passage does not supply that information. The Bible says Jesus made wine, the governor judged it excellent, and the miracle manifested Christ's glory. Those facts are sufficient to establish the miracle. They are not sufficient to establish that Jesus approved drunkenness.

There is another foolish practice worth exposing. Some people seem to believe that the strength of a doctrinal argument can be measured by the number of inconvenient details it ignores. If the passage mentions wine positively, they wave it around as though Proverbs has disappeared. If the passage warns against drunkenness, others insist that every occurrence of wine throughout the Bible must suddenly mean grape juice. Both methods put the desired conclusion ahead of the text. Second Timothy 2:15 commands the workman to be “rightly dividing the word of truth.” Rightly dividing Scripture requires distinguishing different settings and instructions without tearing apart what God has actually said. A wedding in Galilee is not a command to drink, a medicinal instruction is not a universal recreational privilege, and a warning against drunkenness is not proof that every historical use of wine was identical. The Bible contains no contradictions requiring dishonest repairs. The problem usually begins when a man decides what he wants to believe before opening the Book. A crooked ruler cannot produce a straight measurement, no matter how religiously the fellow holds it.

3. When Scripture Recognizes Wine, It Does Not Erase Its Warnings

Psalm 104:14–15 declares that God causes grass to grow for cattle and herbs for the service of man, bringing food out of the earth, “And wine that maketh glad the heart of man,

and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart." There is a positive acknowledgment of wine within a psalm celebrating God's provision throughout creation. The verse should not be concealed, rewritten, or treated as an unfortunate mistake. It belongs in the Bible because God placed it there. But notice the setting. The psalm praises the Creator for His provisions, placing wine alongside oil and bread within the broader goodness of the created world. It does not instruct a man to become intoxicated, neglect his responsibilities, or defend an appetite that has gained mastery over him. Bread is a blessing, but gluttony remains a sin. Food sustains life, but abusing it does not become holy merely because God created the ingredients. The goodness of a provision never establishes the righteousness of every possible use. Otherwise, somebody could defend almost any excess by pointing out that its ingredients originated somewhere in God's creation.

Deuteronomy 14:26 presents another passage that cannot be ignored. Under the instructions given to Israel, the people were told concerning their appointed rejoicing before the LORD, "And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink." That verse destroys the claim that every historical consumption of strong drink was universally and explicitly forbidden under the Mosaic law. But the verse also belongs to Israel's covenant arrangements, including specific instructions concerning tithes, the place God would choose, and rejoicing before Him. It is not a New Testament commandment instructing the local church to provide a liquor cabinet. Somebody who refuses to distinguish Israel under the law from the Church under grace has already mishandled the passage before arriving at the question of drinking. The text must be acknowledged in its own setting, and so must the warnings elsewhere in Scripture. A man does not become an expert in rightly dividing the Bible by crossing the dispensational boundaries whenever he finds something he wants.

The recognition of wine within Scripture makes the moral question more precise, not less important. It demonstrates why believers should avoid inventing prohibitions and why defenders of recreational drinking must also stop pretending that the existence of a permitted use settles every question of conduct. In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul declares, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." Lawfulness and spiritual profitability are not identical. A Christian may face a situation where an action is not expressly forbidden, yet the action remains unwise, unhelpful, or harmful to another believer. The same principle applies to many ordinary matters of Christian conduct, and alcohol is certainly not exempt. The question is whether something builds up, serves a legitimate purpose, honors God, and remains under proper control. If a person hears the Bible acknowledge wine and immediately concludes that the

discussion is finished, he has stopped reading much too early. God has more than one verse on the subject, and the remaining verses are not decorative material.

4. A Little Wine for Thy Stomach's Sake Is Not a License for the Saloon

First Timothy 5:23 is probably among the most frequently quoted medical instructions in the entire Bible whenever somebody wishes to defend drinking. Paul writes to Timothy, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.” Notice the circumstances before converting the instruction into permission for an entirely different activity. Paul is addressing Timothy, a minister of the gospel who experienced recurring bodily infirmities, including trouble involving his stomach. The instruction concerns the use of a little wine for a particular physical purpose. It is not addressed to every healthy individual seeking an evening's entertainment. It is not an instruction to pursue intoxication. It does not say to use as much as one pleases, nor does it identify drinking as an essential mark of Christian liberty. The words “a little” and “for thy stomach's sake” are not incidental decorations. They define the recommendation. A man who quotes the verse while ignoring its qualifying language is not interpreting Scripture. He is using Timothy's stomach to defend his own appetite.

Consider the absurdity of the reasoning sometimes employed. A fellow announces that Paul told Timothy to use wine medicinally, and therefore nobody should question his recreational drinking. By that method, a physician prescribing medication for a particular disease would provide everybody else with permission to take it for entertainment. The argument is foolish before anybody even opens the Bible. Medicine is administered for a legitimate purpose, not merely because somebody enjoys its effects. The fact that a substance can serve a medicinal function does not justify every other use of the substance. Neither should Christians condemn appropriate medical treatment merely because some medications can impair judgment or produce dependence when misused. Scripture recognizes bodily infirmities, and there is no virtue in refusing necessary treatment to maintain an appearance of superior spirituality. Timothy was not rebuked for having a stomach problem, and Paul did not instruct him to prove his faith by ignoring it. The passage demonstrates care for legitimate bodily needs, not permission to transform the medicine cabinet into an entertainment center.

The verse also reveals something about the importance of reading exactly what Paul wrote. “Drink no longer water” indicates a change from Timothy's ordinary practice, but the text does not establish every detail of his previous drinking habits. “Use a little wine” identifies a limited use, but the verse does not furnish a complete description of the wine's preparation or strength. “Thine often infirmities” explains the recurring physical circumstances that prompted the instruction. Those are the facts. Anything beyond them

must be identified as interpretation rather than misrepresented as an explicit biblical statement. The broader pastoral instruction of First Timothy calls for sobriety, sound judgment, and godliness among church leaders. Paul was not writing one verse to cancel everything else he had taught about Christian character. A man should be ashamed to transform a sick preacher's medical recommendation into a universal excuse for recreational indulgence. Timothy's infirmities were real. Paul's concern was real. The instruction was specific. The attempt to use it as a blanket defense for drinking is a different matter altogether.

5. The Same Bible That Records Wine Also Warns Against the Serpent

Proverbs 23:29–30 asks, “Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?” The answer identifies those who linger at wine and pursue mixed wine. Then comes the warning in Proverbs 23:31: “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.” Verse 32 adds, “At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.” There is no uncertainty about the danger being described. The passage confronts the attraction and consequences of intoxicating drink, particularly the destructive pattern of excessive consumption. The warning against looking upon the wine is deliberately forceful because the attraction itself forms part of the danger. It is not a prohibition against accidentally seeing a bottle on a grocery shelf. It is a warning against allowing the appealing presentation of drink to draw a person toward destructive indulgence. God is not confused about what intoxication can do to a man.

Proverbs 20:1 declares, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” That verse belongs to the same Bible as John chapter 2, Psalm 104, and First Timothy 5:23. Nobody has permission to eliminate it merely because it presents an inconvenient warning. Proverbs 31:4–5 likewise instructs King Lemuel concerning rulers: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.” The immediate application concerns the responsibilities of those who govern and administer justice, but the underlying danger is impaired judgment. A ruler who cannot think clearly may harm those depending upon his decisions. A father, employer, pastor, or driver likewise bears responsibilities that require sound judgment. There is little wisdom in deliberately diminishing one's faculties while pretending that responsibility has somehow taken the evening off. Sobriety does not become unnecessary simply because the clock has reached five.

Isaiah 5:11 warns against those who rise early to follow strong drink and continue until night until wine inflames them. In its historical setting, Isaiah is confronting sin among

God's covenant people and announcing judgment upon Judah. The warning cannot be stripped from that setting and presented as an identical national covenant threat against the New Testament Church. Nevertheless, the evil of surrendering one's life to intoxicating pleasure remains evident. The problem is not that Scripture occasionally acknowledges wine while elsewhere condemning it, as though God had contradicted Himself. The problem is that different passages address different uses, circumstances, dangers, and responsibilities. A substance may have a recognized place in a particular setting while its misuse remains spiritually and physically destructive. The person who reads only the favorable references is not practicing balance. He is practicing selection. And the fellow who insists that John 2 settles the entire matter ought to explain why the Lord gave us Proverbs 23 as well. One miracle does not repeal a chapter of wisdom, regardless of how convenient the repeal would be.

6. Be Not Drunk With Wine: The Command the Drinking Advocate Keeps Overlooking

Ephesians 5:18 states, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” Here we have a direct New Testament command addressed to believers in the Church Age. Whatever questions may remain concerning the proper interpretation of historical uses of wine, there is no uncertainty about the condemnation of drunkenness. Paul sets intoxication in direct contrast with the filling of the Holy Spirit. The believer is not instructed to seek a chemically induced alteration of judgment, but to live under the governing influence of the Spirit of God. The preceding verses command Christians to walk circumspectly, redeem the time, avoid foolishness, and understand the will of the Lord. The following verses describe spiritual songs, thanksgiving, and godly relationships. That is the immediate context. The Christian life is supposed to produce spiritual understanding and obedient conduct, not a temporary escape from responsibility through intoxication. The man who celebrates the wedding at Cana while habitually disregarding Ephesians 5:18 has remembered the refreshments and forgotten the commandments.

The expression “wherein is excess” must not be twisted into a suggestion that drunkenness becomes acceptable when somebody calls it moderate. The command is plainly against being drunk with wine. At the same time, intellectual honesty requires acknowledging that the verse does not explicitly state that every quantity of alcoholic wine constitutes drunkenness. God did not give us permission to change the wording in either direction. What He did give us is a direct prohibition against intoxication and an unmistakable contrast between the influence of wine and the filling of the Spirit. Galatians 5:19–21 identifies drunkenness among the works of the flesh, while Galatians 5:22–23 identifies temperance among the fruit of the Spirit. Temperance involves self-control, not merely the ability to explain why a habit should be permitted. A man may be technically correct that a

particular conduct is not expressly forbidden while being spiritually foolish in the way he pursues it. The Bible does not command Christians to make a career out of locating the outer limits of permissible indulgence.

There is also a serious difference between being filled with the Holy Spirit and merely refraining from alcohol. A person may never touch intoxicating drink and still be proud, covetous, dishonest, bitter, or lost without Jesus Christ. Sobriety cannot save a soul, and abstinence cannot replace the new birth. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. The filling of the Spirit concerns the believer's walk, obedience, and fellowship with God, not some religious achievement purchased by maintaining a spotless record of external behavior. Nevertheless, a genuinely Spirit-filled life will not celebrate the very sins Scripture condemns. The believer's body belongs to the Lord, and First Corinthians 6:19–20 reminds Christians that they are bought with a price and must glorify God in their bodies and spirits. If a man has enough time to argue endlessly about his right to drink, perhaps he could spend a portion of that time asking whether his conduct glorifies the Saviour who purchased him. Christian liberty is a wonderful truth, but it was never intended to become a hiding place for the flesh.

7. Christian Liberty Is Not Permission to Become a Stumblingblock

Romans 14:21 declares, “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.” Notice that Paul does not frame the question exclusively around what the individual believer believes he is permitted to consume. He introduces the effect of one's conduct upon another Christian. The immediate context involves matters of conscience, disputable practices, and the responsibility of believers to avoid placing genuine spiritual obstacles before one another. Romans 14:17 declares, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” There is the proper order of priorities. The believer's responsibility to act in charity carries greater weight than his determination to exercise every possible liberty. A man who insists that he must have his drink regardless of what it may encourage in a vulnerable brother has demonstrated something worth examining. He may have won his argument over permission while losing sight of the commandment to love.

Paul is not teaching that every personal dislike automatically becomes a universal rule for all Christians. A person can object to something without that objection proving the thing sinful. The stumblingblock principle concerns genuine spiritual harm, the violation of conscience, and conduct that encourages another person toward sin. That distinction must be preserved, or the strongest opinion in the congregation would become the final authority over everybody else's Christian life. Nevertheless, the principle carries

considerable weight when alcohol is involved. Consider the believer who has struggled for years with drinking, fought through repeated relapses, and finally begun establishing a sober life. Now imagine another Christian encouraging him to drink because the second Christian believes moderate drinking is permissible. What has been accomplished? The supposedly stronger Christian has exercised a liberty in a manner that may endanger the weaker. First Corinthians 8:12 warns that sinning against the brethren and wounding their weak conscience is sinning against Christ. That is a serious price to pay merely to prove that somebody knows how to defend a glass of wine.

First Corinthians 10:31 provides another searching standard: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” The question is no longer confined to whether a particular act can be defended through an isolated biblical reference. It concerns the glory of God, the edification of others, the believer's conscience, and the testimony of the gospel. Can the Christian abstain when abstinence is the wiser choice? Can he surrender a permissible pleasure without complaining that somebody has stolen his freedom? Can he recognize that another believer's struggle may require a greater degree of care than his own habits would otherwise demand? Those are questions of spiritual maturity. Romans 14:23 concludes, “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” A man should never deliberately violate his conscience simply because another person assures him that something is permissible. And if drinking has already gained mastery over his decisions, First Corinthians 6:12 answers the matter plainly: “I will not be brought under the power of any.” Liberty that must constantly defend its chains has become a peculiar sort of freedom.

Conclusion — Stop Making the Lord Jesus Christ Defend Your Appetite

The Lord Jesus Christ turned water into wine at Cana of Galilee. That is a biblical fact, and nobody should be ashamed to confess it. The miracle demonstrated His divine power, manifested His glory, and caused His disciples to believe on Him. The Bible also records positive references to wine within God's provision, particular uses permitted to Israel under the law, and Paul's medicinal recommendation to Timothy. Those passages must be acknowledged honestly. But the same inspired Scriptures warn that wine is a mocker, describe its deceptive attraction, expose the consequences of drunkenness, condemn intoxication among the works of the flesh, and command believers to be filled with the Spirit. The existence of one category of biblical references does not eliminate the others. The Bible must be read as a whole, with careful attention to historical setting, direct commands, and the different circumstances addressed. The man who insists that Jesus turned water into wine and therefore every question about his drinking has been settled

has not finished his Bible study. He has merely stopped at the first verse that suited his argument.

There is a greater question here than whether a person can defend the occasional consumption of alcohol. Why is the defense so important? Why does the subject produce such resistance whenever the biblical warnings are brought forward? Why does somebody who insists that drinking means very little to him sometimes become remarkably disturbed at the suggestion of giving it up? Those questions do not prove that every person who drinks occasionally is secretly addicted, and they should not be used to pronounce judgment upon motives that only God can fully know. But they do expose the need for serious self-examination. Second Corinthians 13:5 commands, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.” The Christian should be willing to examine every practice under Scripture rather than protect familiar habits from biblical scrutiny. If a drink can be surrendered without loss, there is no reason to treat abstinence as a tragedy. If surrendering it seems unbearable, the difficulty itself deserves attention. The bottle should never become so important that a believer begins resenting the Bible for questioning its place in his life.

The final authority is not the liquor advertisement, the drinking culture, the opinion of a friend, or the religious argument somebody has rehearsed for twenty years. The final authority is the word of God. Jesus Christ did not come into this world merely to provide an interesting account about wine at a wedding. He came to seek and to save that which was lost, to give His life a ransom for many, and to accomplish the redemption that sinners could never obtain through their own righteousness. The saved believer belongs to Him and ought to desire a life marked by wisdom, sobriety, charity, and obedience. There is no need to invent a universal command where Scripture has not stated one, but there is equally no excuse for ignoring the commands and warnings God has plainly given. Let the wedding at Cana demonstrate the glory of Christ. Let Timothy's instruction remain a legitimate medicinal recommendation. Let Proverbs warn against the serpent, Romans teach the responsibility of liberty, and Ephesians command the filling of the Holy Spirit. Every passage has its place, and every passage deserves obedience in its proper application. The man who searches the Bible only to defend his bottle has missed the purpose of opening it. **The word of God was given to govern our appetites, not to become their attorney.**

3 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — Just a Social Drink? The Dangerous Excuse of Christian Liberty

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 6:12 — "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

There is something remarkable about the way certain Christians discover the doctrine of liberty whenever somebody questions their drinking habits. A man may go six months without mentioning Christian freedom, but ask him why he needs a beer with his dinner, and suddenly he becomes a constitutional attorney for the kingdom of heaven. He knows his rights, understands grace, recognizes legalism, and can quote enough Scripture to convince himself that the discussion should be over before it begins. "It's just a social drink," he announces. "I'm not getting drunk. I know my limits. The Bible doesn't forbid having one or two." Well, perhaps we ought to open the Bible before either side starts handing out verdicts. Scripture does not explicitly condemn every instance of alcohol consumption, and pretending otherwise is not faithful exposition. But neither does the absence of a universal prohibition make every practice wise, spiritually profitable, or worthy of a blood-bought Christian. The difference between what a man can defend and what he ought to practice is sometimes wider than the distance between the saloon and the sanctuary.

First Corinthians 6:12 contains one of the most searching statements ever written concerning Christian liberty: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Notice that Paul does not stop after announcing liberty. He immediately introduces two additional considerations: whether something is expedient and whether it exercises power over him. Those considerations have a remarkable way of disappearing when someone begins defending a questionable habit. The modern argument frequently begins and ends with permission. If no verse explicitly forbids a particular action under every circumstance, the action is declared acceptable, and anyone questioning its wisdom is accused of legalism. But Paul refuses to let the matter rest there. The believer must consider spiritual profit, personal mastery, Christian testimony, and responsibility toward others. Liberty is not an exemption from godly judgment. It is freedom that must be exercised under the authority of Jesus Christ. A man who quotes the first half of Paul's statement while ignoring the second has not discovered Christian liberty. He has merely discovered how to stop reading at a convenient location.

The issue becomes especially serious when the subject is alcohol, because the consequences of its misuse are neither imaginary nor confined to the individual holding the glass. I have witnessed what drinking can do in homes, prisons, and hospitals, and those experiences are not erased by somebody announcing that he only drinks socially. At the

same time, the tragedy of one person's addiction does not establish that every individual who consumes alcohol will become an alcoholic. The Bible deserves better than exaggerated claims, careless accusations, or manufactured commandments. But it also deserves better than the shallow reasoning that says, “It hasn't hurt me yet, therefore nobody should question it.” The Christian ought to possess enough spiritual maturity to examine a practice before it becomes destructive, not merely after the consequences arrive. The question is not whether the person can produce a defense impressive enough to silence his critics. The question is whether the conduct can withstand the examination of Scripture. **A liberty that cannot tolerate biblical examination has already begun behaving like an idol.**

1. All Things Are Lawful, but Not All Things Are Profitable

The apostle Paul wrote First Corinthians to a local church surrounded by idolatry, immorality, pagan customs, and the corrupt practices of a Gentile city. The believers were saved by the grace of God, but they still needed correction concerning conduct, fellowship, the body, the conscience, and Christian testimony. In First Corinthians 6, Paul addresses matters involving unrighteous behavior, fornication, and the misuse of the body. Therefore, the expression “All things are lawful unto me” cannot reasonably mean that every action imaginable has become morally acceptable. Paul had just warned against sins that Scripture expressly condemns. His statement concerns the proper exercise of freedom, not the abolition of righteousness. The verse does not provide permission to commit fornication, practice drunkenness, defraud a neighbor, or rebel against God. Any interpretation that turns Christian liberty into permission for what God directly forbids has already contradicted the surrounding chapter. Grace did not give the Corinthian believers permission to bring the habits of Corinth into the church and then congratulate themselves for escaping legalism.

The word “expedient” deserves close attention because it introduces a standard frequently neglected in modern discussions of Christian conduct. Something may be lawful without being advantageous, appropriate, useful, or spiritually profitable. Paul understood that believers must consider more than whether an action can be defended against an accusation of sin. They must consider whether it promotes the purposes of God in their lives. Imagine a man standing beside a dangerous cliff, announcing that no law explicitly forbids him from walking along its crumbling edge. He may be correct about the absence of a particular prohibition, but nobody with any sense would mistake his argument for evidence of wisdom. The question is not merely whether he is permitted to stand there. The question is why he is so determined to stand there when safer ground is available. Christian liberty should produce mature judgment, not a childish obsession with

discovering how close someone can approach danger without receiving a direct command to retreat.

Apply that principle to the Christian defending social drinking. The person may insist that he never becomes intoxicated, never drives while impaired, never neglects his family, and never experiences an obvious consequence. Those claims may be entirely sincere, and there is no justification for inventing accusations against him. But Paul's question remains: Is the practice expedient? Does it strengthen the believer's walk with God? Does it benefit his household, encourage godliness, protect his judgment, and contribute something worthwhile to his Christian testimony? Not every ordinary pleasure must function as a formal religious activity, but every believer remains accountable for the manner in which he uses his freedom. A Christian can enjoy a meal without imagining that every bite must become a sermon. Nevertheless, he cannot use that observation to dismiss the special dangers attached to intoxication. The bottle is not entitled to a permanent exemption from biblical scrutiny simply because somebody has learned how to consume its contents without attracting public attention.

2. I Will Not Be Brought Under the Power of Any

The second half of First Corinthians 6:12 delivers the blow that the defender of questionable habits would often prefer to avoid: “I will not be brought under the power of any.” There is a distinction between possessing a liberty and being mastered by the thing one claims liberty to enjoy. Paul speaks as a man who refuses to surrender control of his conduct to an appetite. He has already declared that the believer's body belongs to the Lord, and later in the chapter he writes, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Corinthians 6:20). The Christian is not his own ultimate authority. He belongs to Jesus Christ. That truth ought to govern the body, mind, speech, desires, and decisions. An appetite that begins dictating terms to its owner has crossed an important line. It does not matter whether the substance involved is alcohol or another indulgence. When a thing that was supposed to be enjoyed becomes something that must be obeyed, the servant has climbed onto the throne.

Consider the familiar statement, “I can quit anytime I want.” Very well. Then why does the possibility of quitting produce such an argument? Why does the suggestion of abstinence immediately bring forth explanations about personal rights, Christian freedom, historical wine consumption, and the supposed legalism of everyone who disagrees? Those reactions do not establish that the individual is addicted, but they can reveal an attachment worth examining. It is possible to enjoy something without being mastered by it, and it is equally possible to become so accustomed to a pleasure that surrendering it begins to feel like an intolerable sacrifice. Proverbs 25:28 declares, “He that hath no rule

over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." In the ancient world, a city without protective walls was vulnerable to attack. The man without self-control has surrendered a similar defense. A respectable appearance does not repair the missing wall, and calling the enemy a guest does not make the city secure.

This is where the discussion must move beyond counting drinks and examining appearances. A man can abstain from alcohol for weeks and still spend his time anticipating the next opportunity. Another may consume it occasionally without experiencing the same attachment. Those distinctions matter, because Scripture does not authorize us to pronounce every occasional drinker an addict. Nevertheless, the believer must ask whether his desires remain properly governed. First Corinthians 9:27 records Paul's determination to keep his body under and bring it into subjection, lest after preaching to others he should become a castaway. In context, Paul is addressing disciplined service and the danger of becoming disapproved in that service, not teaching that a saved man loses eternal life through insufficient self-control. His concern is that bodily appetites must not govern the servant of God. If the man preaching righteousness cannot govern his own conduct, his ministry testimony suffers. The Christian who boasts that he can handle his liquor should be at least as concerned about whether he can handle his flesh.

3. The Difference Between Being Permitted and Being Edifying

First Corinthians 10:23 develops the principle further: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." The additional expression "edify not" brings the spiritual welfare of others directly into view. In the surrounding chapters, Paul addresses meat associated with idols, the conscience, fellowship, and the conduct of believers living among unbelievers. The apostle does not treat every circumstance identically. First Corinthians 10:25 allows believers to eat what is sold in the shambles without raising questions for conscience's sake. Yet when the connection with idolatrous sacrifice is deliberately brought to their attention, Paul instructs them to consider the other person's conscience. The same action can therefore require different judgment according to its circumstances and consequences. That is not inconsistency. It is Christian discernment. A man who demands one simplistic rule for every situation may find Paul's instructions inconvenient, but the apostle was more concerned about honoring Christ than protecting somebody's appetite from careful examination.

The immediate context also places limits upon the application. Paul is not declaring alcoholic beverages and meat offered to idols identical in every moral respect. Intoxication has dangers that ordinary food does not carry, and drunkenness is expressly condemned

elsewhere in Scripture. The legitimate connection is the governing principle: Christian freedom must consider expediency, edification, conscience, and the spiritual welfare of others. First Corinthians 10:24 declares, “Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.” In this setting, the concern is another person's good, not a command to seize his possessions. The believer must think beyond himself. The Christian who continually announces, “It is my body, my decision, my liberty, and my business,” has apparently overlooked the apostle's instruction to consider somebody besides the fellow making the announcement. Christianity is not a religious organization devoted to making every individual appetite comfortable. It is a life of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, whose example was one of sacrificial service.

Suppose a Christian hosts an evening gathering and knows that one of his guests has spent years struggling to escape alcohol. The host may believe he can consume a drink without becoming intoxicated, but should his personal preference outweigh his guest's welfare? Would refusing to serve alcohol destroy the evening, damage the fellowship, or prevent anybody from enjoying a decent meal? Of course not. Yet some people behave as though Christian hospitality becomes impossible without opening a bottle. That is an astonishingly narrow definition of fellowship for people who claim to possess the riches of God's grace. Romans 15:2 declares, “Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.” The spiritually mature believer understands that voluntarily surrendering a preference can be an expression of strength rather than weakness. He does not need to demonstrate liberty by exercising it at every available opportunity. A Christian who cannot enjoy the company of his brethren without defending his drinking arrangements ought to consider whether the problem is the company or the bottle.

4. The Weaker Brother Is Not an Inconvenience to Your Liberty

Romans 14:13 declares, “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.” Paul is dealing with disputes concerning food, the observing of particular days, personal convictions, and the responsibilities of believers whose consciences differ. He does not command Christians to abandon discernment or pretend that plainly condemned sins have become matters of private preference. Romans 14 is not a shelter for drunkenness, fornication, dishonesty, or any other conduct expressly forbidden by Scripture. Its concern is the proper treatment of matters in which believers may possess differing convictions without violating a direct divine prohibition. That distinction is essential. A Christian must not turn his personal preferences into commandments that God never gave, but neither may he use the language of liberty to dismiss behavior that God has condemned. Both errors misuse Scripture. The religious fellow manufacturing commandments and the

worldly fellow manufacturing excuses may disagree about everything else, but they share a remarkable talent for appointing themselves editors of the Bible.

Romans 14:21 states, “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.” Paul makes the issue personal. The believer is not permitted to ignore the legitimate spiritual welfare of another simply because he believes his own conduct is acceptable. Notice that wine appears specifically in the verse. The principle therefore does not require some complicated process of dragging alcohol into a passage where it was never mentioned. It is already there. At the same time, a stumblingblock must be understood biblically. Somebody disapproving of another Christian's behavior does not automatically establish that the behavior causes him to stumble. The danger involves encouraging another toward sin, wounding a vulnerable conscience, or placing a genuine obstacle before spiritual obedience. That is particularly important where alcohol is concerned. A recovering drinker who cannot safely consume alcohol may be seriously endangered by another person's careless encouragement. The Christian who dismisses that danger because he personally has no problem controlling his consumption has confused his circumstances with everybody else's.

Romans 14:15 adds, “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.” The weight of that statement ought to end some arguments before they begin. Paul places the spiritual welfare of the brother for whom Christ died above the exercise of a personal preference. He does not say that the stronger believer becomes spiritually superior by announcing how little he cares about another person's conscience. He teaches charity, restraint, and responsibility. First Corinthians 8:13 expresses the same principle when Paul declares that he will eat no flesh while the world standeth if eating it causes his brother to offend. Now that is a remarkable contrast with the modern Christian who seems prepared to defend his occasional drink until the judgment seat of Christ. Paul was willing to surrender a legitimate liberty indefinitely for another believer's sake. Some modern defenders of liberty act as though surrendering one evening's beverage would constitute religious persecution. The apostle's example leaves very little room for that kind of self-importance.

5. Use Not Liberty for an Occasion to the Flesh

Galatians 5:13 declares, “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” This verse destroys the idea that Christian freedom exists primarily to protect the desires of the old nature. Paul's letter to the Galatians confronts the error of placing believers under the law as a means of justification and spiritual standing before God. Salvation and justification are not obtained

through circumcision, ceremonial observances, or human works. The believer stands in the liberty provided through Jesus Christ. But the very apostle who defends that liberty immediately warns against using it as an opportunity for the flesh. Paul knew that a man could reject legalism and still surrender himself to sinful desires. Escaping one form of religious bondage does not justify entering another form of personal bondage. The fellow who escapes the prison of works-righteousness only to volunteer for the chains of fleshly appetite has misunderstood the liberty purchased for him at Calvary.

The distinction between legalism and biblical holiness must be maintained. Legalism, in the doctrinal issue confronting Galatia, involved treating law-keeping as necessary to justification and standing before God. Scripture also condemns the invention of man-made religious requirements that displace divine authority. But obeying an actual commandment of God is not legalism, and voluntarily abstaining from something for the sake of wisdom or testimony is not legalism either. A Christian who declines alcohol because of its dangers, his personal convictions, or concern for others has not thereby denied salvation by grace. Neither should that believer declare that his own abstinence earns salvation or automatically proves that every other Christian is living in rebellion. The gospel must not be converted into a contest of external performances. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, while Ephesians 2:10 teaches that believers are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Good works follow salvation; they do not purchase it. Grace does not make holiness unnecessary. It places holiness upon the proper foundation.

Galatians 5:19–21 identifies drunkenness among the works of the flesh, and verses 22–23 identify temperance among the fruit of the Spirit. The contrast is not difficult to understand. The works of the flesh expose sinful human conduct, while the fruit of the Spirit demonstrates the character produced through the believer's walk with God. Temperance is self-control, not merely the ability to remain outwardly respectable while continually indulging a desire. The passage does not identify every consumption of alcohol with drunkenness, and forcing it to say so would be dishonest. But it certainly denies the Christian any right to celebrate drunkenness as freedom. Galatians 5:16 commands, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” That is the direction of the Christian life. The Spirit leads the believer toward obedience, not toward an endless search for technical exceptions. When a man becomes more interested in proving what his flesh may enjoy than discovering how he may serve Christ, liberty has stopped being his doctrine and started becoming his excuse.

6. A Cloak of Liberty Cannot Hide a Rebellious Heart

First Peter 2:16 commands believers to live “As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.” The surrounding passage concerns honorable

conduct among the Gentiles, submission to lawful authority, and the believer's testimony before an unbelieving world. Peter is not discussing alcohol specifically, but he establishes a principle that reaches directly into the misuse of Christian freedom. Liberty must not become a covering for wickedness. The word “cloke” presents a vivid picture of something placed over another thing to conceal it. A man may wrap a questionable practice in religious language while the motive underneath remains selfish, rebellious, or fleshly. He can quote grace, celebrate liberty, and condemn legalism while refusing to examine whether his conduct honors God. The religious vocabulary may sound impressive, but an expensive coat does not change the character of the fellow wearing it. Scripture is not impressed by the appearance of freedom when freedom is being used to conceal disobedience.

Peter's closing expression is equally important: “but as the servants of God.” There is the proper relationship between liberty and authority. The Christian is free in Christ, but he is not free from Christ. First Corinthians 7:22 declares that the person called in the Lord while being a servant is the Lord's freeman, and the person called while free is Christ's servant. Biblical freedom does not mean that the redeemed individual becomes his own final authority. He belongs to the One who purchased him. Therefore, the believer's decisions must be governed by the Lord's commandments and the principles of His word. This is particularly searching when a Christian insists that nobody has the right to question his drinking. Nobody needs to invent accusations or assume authority over another person's conscience, but Scripture certainly possesses the right to examine every believer's conduct. The man who resents that examination has a greater problem than his beverage selection. He has begun treating personal preference as though it outranked divine authority.

There is also a practical responsibility concerning the testimony Christians present before the world. First Peter 2:12 instructs believers to maintain honest conduct among the Gentiles, so that accusations against them may be answered by their good works. A Christian should never live merely to satisfy the changing expectations of unbelievers, and nobody can guarantee that every observer will approve of righteous conduct. Nevertheless, needless compromise can undermine an otherwise faithful testimony. Consider the professing believer who publicly defends drinking as a harmless pleasure while privately crossing boundaries he previously insisted he would never cross. Perhaps he has begun concealing how much he consumes, neglecting responsibilities, or becoming angry when someone expresses concern. At that point, the issue is no longer a theoretical argument about liberty. It is a matter of integrity. A testimony is not preserved by winning a debate while losing control of one's conduct. The world has plenty of people who can produce

clever excuses for their appetites. What it needs to see in Christians is the evidence that Jesus Christ makes a genuine difference.

7. If You Do Not Need the Drink, Why Fight So Hard to Keep It?

First Corinthians 10:31 declares, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Notice the breadth of that instruction. The apostle does not reserve God's glory for Sunday morning, the church building, or the occasions when somebody is watching. Eating, drinking, and every ordinary part of life fall under the believer's responsibility to honor the Lord. This does not mean every permissible pleasure must be accompanied by a formal religious explanation. It means the Christian cannot divide his life into one compartment governed by Scripture and another governed entirely by personal appetite. The man who exercises careful judgment in his employment should exercise judgment in his recreation. The father who teaches sobriety to his children should consider the example established by his own choices. The believer who warns others about addiction should avoid treating alcohol as an indispensable ingredient of fellowship. The Christian life was never intended to be an endless negotiation over how much worldliness can be accommodated without crossing a visible line.

There is particular danger in the habit of continually adjusting one's convictions to accommodate what one has begun to enjoy. A man initially decides that he will never drink. Later he decides that an occasional drink is harmless. Eventually he establishes another boundary, then another, until the original conviction has been reduced to a memory. That progression is not inevitable for everyone, and changing a conviction because Scripture has corrected an earlier misunderstanding is not automatically compromise. The danger appears when appetite, rather than biblical truth, begins determining the adjustments. Romans 14:22 declares, “Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.” Verse 23 warns against acting contrary to faith and conscience. A believer should never silence a conscience troubled by Scripture simply because he wants permission to continue a practice. Nor should he insist that another Christian violate sincere convictions to demonstrate freedom. A conscience must be instructed by the Bible, not trained to surrender whenever the flesh presents another attractive proposal.

There is a question that deserves to be asked without sarcasm or evasion: If the occasional drink is genuinely unnecessary, why does defending it sometimes become so necessary? The question is not proof of addiction, nor does it establish that every person who disagrees about alcohol possesses a rebellious heart. But it is a legitimate invitation to examine priorities. What would be lost if the drink were surrendered? Would fellowship become impossible? Would a celebration lose its meaning? Would relaxation cease to exist? Would dinner become unbearable? If the answer to those questions is no, then

abstinence is hardly the terrible deprivation some make it out to be. If the answer is yes, the believer has discovered something about the importance alcohol has acquired in his life. Philippians 4:8 instructs Christians to direct their minds toward things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. A life filled with the things of God has no shortage of worthwhile pleasures. A Christian who can enjoy the riches of Christ should not behave as though happiness depends upon the contents of a glass.

Conclusion — Liberty That Cannot Say No Has Changed Masters

Christian liberty is a precious doctrine, purchased through the finished work of Jesus Christ and established upon the grace of God. It must never be surrendered to legalism, religious intimidation, or man-made commandments. Yet the same Scriptures that defend liberty command believers to exercise self-control, consider the welfare of others, avoid drunkenness, and refuse mastery by fleshly appetites. Paul did not ask merely whether something was lawful. He asked whether it was expedient, whether it edified, and whether it possessed power over him. Those are not optional questions invented by overly strict Christians. They are biblical standards established by the Holy Ghost. The man who continually quotes liberty while disregarding those standards is not defending the whole counsel of God. He is defending the fragment that happens to suit him.

No Christian should accuse another of drunkenness without evidence, manufacture a universal prohibition that Scripture has not expressly given, or suggest that abstinence earns salvation. But neither should any believer use those cautions as an excuse to dismiss the dangers of alcohol. There are people whose lives have been ruined by drinking, families that have suffered beneath another person's addiction, and recovering believers for whom one careless encouragement may carry serious consequences. Christian love takes such matters seriously. Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness, not to negotiate endlessly with our appetites. The believer who has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ ought to be willing to surrender a personal pleasure when wisdom, conscience, charity, or obedience requires it.

The final question is not whether a man can win an argument about social drinking. It is whether he can honestly say with Paul, “I will not be brought under the power of any.” If the answer is yes, he should have no difficulty examining his conduct or surrendering a preference when necessary. If the answer is no, the argument about liberty has already exposed a deeper concern. Jesus Christ did not save sinners so they could spend their Christian lives defending the smallest indulgence they could justify. He saved them by grace and called them to walk worthy of their calling. **The strongest Christian is not the fellow who can explain why he is allowed to have another drink. It is the one who**

possesses enough liberty to leave the bottle alone without feeling that he has lost anything worth keeping.

4 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — The Bottle Comes Home: When Families Pay for Someone Else's Drinking

Key Passage: 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?" (Proverbs 23:29)

There is something terribly dishonest about a man who insists that his drinking is nobody else's business while his entire household is suffering because of it. He buys the bottle, pours the drink, enjoys the sensation, and announces that he has a perfect right to do whatever he pleases. Meanwhile, his wife is wondering what kind of mood he will be in when he comes home, his children are listening for the sound of his car, and the money that should have paid the household bills has mysteriously disappeared into the liquor store's cash register. But according to the fellow holding the glass, everybody else needs to mind his own business. Isn't that remarkable? He has managed to make his pleasure a personal liberty and everybody else's suffering a private inconvenience. Proverbs 23:29 asks, "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions?" The Holy Ghost knew exactly where to begin. The bottle promises pleasure to the purchaser, but it has a dreadful habit of sending the bill to people who never ordered anything.

There are homes where a child can distinguish between a sober parent and an intoxicated parent before the front door even opens. The sound of the automobile, the manner in which the key enters the lock, the heaviness of the footsteps, and the tone of the first spoken words become signals of what kind of evening lies ahead. Some children learn to disappear into their bedrooms. Others attempt to keep younger brothers and sisters quiet. A wife may discover that ordinary conversation becomes an argument without warning, while a husband may watch his wife descend into a destructive drinking habit that threatens everything they have built together. I have seen enough in homes, prisons, and hospitals to know that the consequences of alcohol do not remain confined to the person drinking it. There are family members who have endured years of broken promises, financial trouble, humiliation, and uncertainty without ever touching the bottle themselves. A liquor advertisement can fit a smiling family around a dinner table. It has considerably more difficulty fitting the wreckage of that family into the same picture.

The Bible does not require us to pretend that every person who consumes alcohol becomes violent, irresponsible, or addicted. Such a claim would be false, and exaggeration does not strengthen the word of God. But Scripture plainly condemns drunkenness, warns against the deceptive power of intoxicating drink, and establishes definite responsibilities within the home. Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Ephesians 6:4 forbids fathers to provoke their children to wrath. First Timothy 5:8 speaks with extraordinary severity about neglecting one's household. Galatians 6:7 warns that a man will reap what he sows. Those commandments do not disappear because somebody has developed an appetite that makes obedience inconvenient. Neither does another person's sinful drinking automatically make the suffering spouse or child responsible for correcting it. Every individual must answer for his own conduct. The bottle may belong to one person, but the damage often spreads throughout the household, and God has never granted anybody permission to sacrifice his family upon the altar of personal indulgence.

1. Who Hath Woe? The Family Knows the Answer

Proverbs 23:29–30 declares, “Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.” This passage belongs to the wisdom instruction of the Old Testament, originally given in the setting of Israel, but the moral consequences of drunkenness did not expire with the Mosaic economy. Notice that the passage begins with misery and conflict before mentioning the visible physical effects. Woe, sorrow, and contentions are not minor inconveniences. They describe trouble that reaches beyond the individual and enters relationships. A drunken person may experience the immediate effects of intoxication, but the people living with him may endure the resulting arguments, uncertainty, and disgrace. The man staggering through the door may forget what happened that evening. The frightened child hiding behind that door may remember it for fifty years. Alcohol can impair the drinker's memory without erasing the family's experience.

Proverbs 23:33 continues, “Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.” The passage exposes the moral dangers associated with impaired judgment, including sexual temptation and corrupt speech. Imagine a husband explaining to his wife that the words he shouted, the humiliation he caused, and the inappropriate behavior he displayed should all be dismissed because he had too much to drink. What an extraordinary defense! He voluntarily surrendered his judgment, then expects intoxication to excuse whatever happened afterward. Drunkenness does not magically transform wrongdoing into righteousness. The damage caused by cruel speech remains real even

when the speaker cannot remember every word. A wife who has been threatened or humiliated does not suddenly become unharmed because her husband wakes up the following morning with a headache and an apology. Neither does a husband cease suffering because his intoxicated wife insists that she never intended to hurt him. Sin may cloud the offender's recollection, but it does not cancel the victim's experience.

The final words of Proverbs 23:35 are among the most revealing in the chapter: “when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.” Here is a man who has suffered consequences and still intends to return to the source of his trouble. That recurring desire helps explain why some households become trapped in a miserable pattern of promises followed by disappointment. The drinker announces that he will change, the family hopes that the declaration is sincere, and then another episode destroys the fragile confidence that had begun to return. Not every promise is deliberately dishonest, and dependence can make recovery genuinely difficult. Nevertheless, repeated promises do not erase repeated consequences. A man cannot keep setting fire to his household and expect everybody to admire the sincerity with which he promises to purchase another fire extinguisher. Repentance must eventually produce conduct consistent with repentance. The family has already heard enough speeches. What it desperately needs is the evidence of a changed life.

2. The House That Folly Pulls Apart

Proverbs 14:1 declares, “Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.” The immediate proverb contrasts wisdom and folly in the conduct of a woman within her household. It must not be twisted into an accusation against a wife whose husband is destroying the home through drinking. A faithful woman may labor diligently to establish a peaceful household while another person's wicked decisions undermine everything she is attempting to build. The same is true of a faithful husband whose wife is enslaved to alcohol. The moral principle is that foolish conduct can destroy what wisdom has worked to establish. A home requires patience, faithfulness, sacrifice, financial responsibility, and trust. Its peace can be seriously damaged by repeated recklessness. A foolish person may spend years enjoying the shelter of a household built through somebody else's labor, then begin tearing it apart through selfish indulgence. The saddest part is that the destruction is often defended as a personal choice.

Consider what it takes to establish an ordinary Christian home. A husband and wife labor to provide food, clothing, housing, education, and the necessities of life. They attempt to teach their children right from wrong, maintain their marriage, fulfill their responsibilities, and establish a testimony before the world. Then alcohol becomes a controlling influence in one person's life. Money disappears, ordinary disagreements become serious

arguments, responsibilities are neglected, and confidence begins to collapse. What took years to establish may be damaged through months of repeated misconduct. Proverbs 24:3–4 declares, “Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” Those riches are not confined to expensive furniture or an impressive bank account. The peace of a faithful marriage, the security of children, and the confidence that a family can depend upon one another are treasures beyond ordinary financial measurement. A man can possess a beautiful house and still be demolishing the home inside it.

Folly rarely announces its intention to destroy a household. It usually arrives with an explanation. The drinker has worked hard, needs to relax, deserves a little enjoyment, and insists that the family should stop exaggerating. Before long, the explanation becomes an accusation: the spouse is too demanding, the children are too noisy, the bills are too stressful, or everybody else is responsible for making life unpleasant. That is a convenient arrangement for somebody who wants the privileges of family life without accepting its responsibilities. Proverbs 14:12 warns, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” The verse teaches the danger of trusting human judgment against divine wisdom. A person may sincerely believe that drinking is providing relief while refusing to acknowledge the harm it is causing. Wisdom examines the outcome rather than defending the excuse. **A home is not destroyed only when somebody walks out the door. Sometimes it is destroyed while everyone is still living under the same roof.**

3. Husbands, Love Your Wives: The Bottle Is Not Your Bride

Ephesians 5:25 commands, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” That command belongs to direct New Testament instruction concerning Christian marriage. Paul is not describing a man's authority to satisfy himself while his wife carries the consequences. He is establishing sacrificial love upon the example of Jesus Christ. The Lord gave Himself for the Church. He did not exploit her, abandon her, or demand that she suffer so He could indulge Himself. The husband therefore has a divine responsibility to place the welfare of his wife above selfish appetites. Ephesians 5:28 declares, “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.” A man who repeatedly frightens, humiliates, neglects, or abuses his wife because of drinking is contradicting the very pattern of love commanded in this passage. Quoting a verse about a wife's submission will not repair his disobedience to the verses commanding him to love her.

Some husbands seem to imagine that providing an occasional paycheck and keeping a roof over the family's head fulfills every responsibility God has placed upon them. Meanwhile, their wives are expected to tolerate drunken arguments, broken promises, and the constant uncertainty of not knowing which version of their husband will come home. Ephesians 5:29 declares that a man nourishes and cherishes his own flesh, “even as the Lord the church.” The language describes care, protection, and genuine concern, not selfish domination. A husband who cherishes his wife does not make her responsible for managing his intoxication. He does not force her to invent excuses, conceal his misconduct, or surrender her peace to preserve his reputation. The marriage covenant is not a contract permitting one person to indulge while the other absorbs every consequence. **A man cannot claim to love his wife like Christ loved the Church while treating the bottle like his first love and his wife like an inconvenience.**

This responsibility is not confined to husbands. Wives are also commanded to conduct themselves in godliness, faithfulness, and obedience to the Lord. Titus 2:4–5 addresses love within the home, while Proverbs 31 presents a woman whose conduct brings good rather than harm. A wife whose drinking produces neglect, dishonesty, intimidation, or household destruction is likewise responsible for her actions. Neither sex receives a special exemption from righteousness. But the person who has suffered another's misconduct must not be accused of failing to love merely because he or she refuses to continue enabling destructive behavior. Biblical love does not require supplying alcohol, paying for repeated indulgence, concealing violence, or accepting continuing danger. Romans 12:18 says, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Notice that peace is not always possible through the actions of one person alone. Marriage requires faithfulness from both parties, and one spouse cannot repent on behalf of the other.

4. When Children Learn to Fear the Sound of the Front Door

Ephesians 6:4 declares, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Here is another direct command given to Christian households. Fathers are responsible for providing godly instruction, correction, and an example consistent with the Scriptures they teach. The command does not permit harshness, intimidation, unpredictable anger, or the use of parental authority as an excuse for cruelty. Colossians 3:21 reinforces the warning: “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” Consider that last expression. A child can become discouraged through repeated exposure to a parent's destructive conduct. A boy who never knows whether his father will arrive home affectionate or furious may eventually learn to remain silent rather than risk provoking another outburst. A daughter who repeatedly

witnesses drunken arguments may begin to associate family life with fear rather than protection. Such children do not need another lecture about respecting their parents. They need parents who take God's commandments seriously.

There is a peculiar kind of hypocrisy in telling children to avoid the very conduct they watch their parents practice. A father may warn his son never to get drunk while regularly treating intoxication as an ordinary part of adult entertainment. A mother may instruct her daughter to choose godly companions while repeatedly surrounding herself with drinking acquaintances whose conduct contradicts the lessons she teaches. The contradiction becomes especially destructive when the drinking parent loses control and expects the children to forget everything by morning. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 originally instructed Israel's households to teach God's commandments diligently to their children. Christian parents are not under Israel's national covenant, but the duty to provide godly instruction remains clearly established in the New Testament. Children learn from words and conduct together. A father can memorize an entire sermon about righteousness, but if his behavior continually contradicts his message, his children may remember the contradiction long after they have forgotten the sermon. The home is a classroom that never closes.

Parents also need to understand that children are not responsible for rescuing them from addiction. A ten-year-old should not become the household peacekeeper, the person hiding the car keys from an intoxicated parent, or the one reassuring younger siblings that everything will be all right. Those responsibilities belong to adults. Nor should children be told that a parent's drinking is caused by their grades, behavior, noise, or ordinary childhood mistakes. Ezekiel 18:20 states, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” within a passage emphasizing individual accountability before God. Its immediate setting concerns Israel and God's dealings with personal righteousness and wickedness, but the distinction between one person's wrongdoing and another person's responsibility is important. A father's drunkenness is not his child's sin. A mother's addiction is not her daughter's guilt. Parents are supposed to protect their children from unnecessary danger, not train them to become permanent caretakers of their own irresponsibility. The parent who repeatedly sacrifices a child's security to alcohol has reversed the entire order of the household.

5. When the Liquor Store Gets Paid Before the Family Does

First Timothy 5:8 delivers one of the sternest statements in the New Testament concerning family responsibility: “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.” The immediate context concerns the care of widows and the responsibility of relatives to provide for family members rather than unnecessarily burden the church. That setting must not be ignored. Nevertheless, the verse establishes the seriousness with which God regards deliberate

neglect of one's household. A man who possesses the means to provide essential care but repeatedly diverts those resources into destructive drinking cannot claim that his conduct is somebody else's business. Neither can a woman who neglects dependent children while spending household necessities on alcohol. The responsibility concerns provision, not merely the appearance of employment. A paycheck does little good when the money disappears before the family's legitimate needs have been met.

Think about the ordinary expenses of raising a family. There are groceries, clothing, transportation, medical care, housing, education, and countless unexpected responsibilities. A household may already be struggling to make ends meet before alcohol enters the picture. Then an increasing portion of the available money begins disappearing into a habit that produces no lasting benefit. The drinker may defend the expense as recreation, but the children cannot eat his recreation, and the electric company is unlikely to accept his empty bottles as payment. Proverbs 21:17 warns, “He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.” The proverb concerns the danger of consuming resources through pleasure-loving habits. It does not teach that every poor person has been irresponsible or that every wealthy person is righteous. It does expose the foolishness of allowing appetite to consume what responsibility requires. A man who faithfully provides for his household should not be condemned for ordinary enjoyment, but neither should destructive spending be excused as harmless entertainment.

Financial neglect frequently brings other sins into the household. A person begins concealing purchases, misrepresenting expenses, borrowing money without honest disclosure, or making promises that cannot be fulfilled. What began as drinking becomes a pattern of dishonesty. Ephesians 4:25 commands believers to put away lying and speak truth, while verse 28 instructs the former thief to labor honestly so that he may have something to give to those in need. Christian conduct moves toward responsibility and generosity, not concealment and exploitation. There are families whose savings have been exhausted, whose credit has been damaged, and whose financial security has been undermined through repeated substance abuse. But the spouse attempting to preserve necessary household funds is not obligated to finance another person's destruction. Refusing to provide money for alcohol is not a failure of Christian charity. Sometimes genuine love requires closing the wallet rather than opening another bottle. The Lord never commanded anybody to demonstrate compassion by purchasing the very thing that is destroying a family member.

6. Forgiveness Does Not Require a Family to Remain in Danger

Some situations move beyond arguments, financial neglect, and broken promises into threats, intimidation, physical violence, or serious danger. At that point, the responsibility to protect vulnerable family members must be stated without hesitation. Psalm 82:3–4 commands, “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.” The passage concerns righteous judgment and protection of the vulnerable, not a command for victims to endure abuse silently. Romans 13:1–4 also recognizes civil authority and its responsibility to restrain wrongdoing. A person who threatens or assaults family members cannot hide behind the language of marriage, parental authority, or Christian forgiveness. Neither intoxication nor a profession of salvation exempts anyone from responsibility for criminal conduct. Where immediate danger exists, securing safety and contacting appropriate emergency assistance take priority over preserving appearances. A home is not a sanctuary when its occupants must live in fear of violence.

There is no biblical command requiring a wife to remain physically present while an intoxicated husband assaults her. There is no command requiring a husband to expose himself or his children to a violent spouse. There is no command instructing children to conceal abuse because exposing it might embarrass the family or the church. Ephesians 5 does not authorize violence, and Ephesians 6 does not grant parents unlimited power to mistreat their children. Acts 5:29 establishes the principle that obedience to God takes precedence over unlawful human demands. A person may need to leave a dangerous setting, involve civil authorities, obtain protective assistance, and establish necessary boundaries. Those actions should not be confused with hatred or an unwillingness to forgive. Christian forgiveness concerns the treatment of wrongdoing before God and others; it does not magically establish that an unsafe person has become trustworthy. The command to forgive is not a command to provide another opportunity for assault.

Churches and pastors bear serious responsibilities in these circumstances. Galatians 6:2 commands believers to bear one another's burdens, while James 1:27 speaks of visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction. A congregation should not respond to a frightened spouse by insisting that the family maintain its outward reputation at any cost. Nor should spiritual leaders attempt to replace lawful protective measures with a private conversation and an optimistic promise. Prayer is necessary, biblical counsel matters, and reconciliation may eventually be possible where genuine repentance and lasting change are established. But prayer must never become an excuse for ignoring an immediate threat. A pastor who would call the authorities after finding a stranger assaulting somebody in the church parking lot should not suddenly become confused about protecting the innocent because the offender happens to be married to the victim. Biblical authority exists to serve

righteousness, not to provide religious cover for wickedness. Protecting the vulnerable is not interference with the family. It is refusing to abandon the family to danger.

7. The Harvest of Drinking and the Hope of Genuine Deliverance

Galatians 6:7 declares, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The apostle Paul is addressing believers in the Church Age, and his instruction concerns the consequences of sowing to the flesh or to the Spirit. This does not teach salvation by works or the loss of eternal life whenever a Christian sins. It establishes that conduct produces consequences, and a profession of faith does not exempt a believer from the harvest of foolish decisions. A man may receive forgiveness for drunkenness and still confront damaged relationships, financial obligations, legal consequences, and the loss of his family's confidence. Those consequences do not necessarily prove that God has abandoned him. They demonstrate that forgiveness and consequences are not identical. The drunkard may be forgiven, but the broken window remains broken, the wasted money remains spent, and the frightened child still needs reassurance. God's mercy does not require everyone else to pretend that the damage never occurred.

Galatians 6:1 also commands spiritual believers to restore someone overtaken in a fault “in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” That instruction is essential because the Christian struggling with alcohol may need serious help rather than another opportunity to receive public humiliation. There are believers who have sincerely repented, remained sober for considerable periods, and then fallen back into destructive drinking. Their failures must not be excused, but neither should repeated struggle automatically be treated as proof that salvation never occurred. First Corinthians 6:11 declares, “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.” Salvation establishes a new standing in Christ; sanctification concerns the believer's continuing walk. Genuine deliverance may involve confession, accountability, the removal of opportunities for temptation, medical treatment, and sustained Christian fellowship. Severe alcohol withdrawal can also be life-threatening, making qualified medical supervision necessary in some circumstances.

But the responsibility to pursue deliverance remains with the person drinking. A wife cannot repent for her husband, a husband cannot overcome his wife's addiction by sheer determination, and children cannot love a parent into sobriety through perfect behavior. The drinker must stop transferring responsibility to everyone around him. A sincere declaration of repentance should be followed by concrete steps demonstrating that the person intends to live differently. Ephesians 4:28 presents a useful principle: the man who

stole is commanded to steal no more and to engage in honest labor. Repentance is not merely sorrow over consequences; it involves turning away from the wrongdoing. Likewise, the person seeking freedom from destructive drinking must accept responsibility for necessary changes. Family members may offer encouragement, assistance, and appropriate forgiveness, but trust must be rebuilt through consistent conduct. The person who has spent years destroying confidence cannot reasonably demand its immediate restoration after one emotional apology. **Forgiveness may be granted in a moment, but trust is rebuilt through faithfulness over time.**

Conclusion — The Bottle May Be Yours, but the Suffering Is Not

There is a dreadful difference between the picture of drinking presented by the world and the experience endured in countless troubled households. The advertisement displays laughter, friendship, relaxation, and celebration. It does not display the wife listening for footsteps, the husband examining another unexplained expense, the child hiding behind a bedroom door, or the family struggling to decide how much longer it can endure another person's destructive behavior. Proverbs 23 describes sorrow, contention, impaired judgment, injuries, and the determination to return for another drink. The warnings are there because the consequences are real. Not every person who consumes alcohol becomes abusive or addicted, but no amount of respectable drinking elsewhere cancels the suffering caused by destructive drinking within a particular family. The person whose alcohol use has brought misery into the household must stop defending the bottle and begin facing the damage. **A man has no right to call something a harmless pleasure when his family has spent years suffering from its consequences.**

The responsibility extends beyond the person drinking. Churches must uphold righteousness without abandoning those suffering under another person's sin. Families should offer help without becoming permanent protectors of destructive behavior. Children must be protected rather than assigned responsibility for an adult's addiction. Husbands and wives must take seriously the commandments concerning love, faithfulness, provision, and godly conduct. Where violence or intimidation exists, safety must not be sacrificed to preserve outward appearances. And where genuine repentance takes place, there should be room for appropriate restoration without demanding that injured family members immediately forget everything they have endured. The Lord never instructed His people to choose between truth and compassion. Ephesians 4:15 speaks of “speaking the truth in love,” and both elements are necessary. Truth without charity may become cruelty, while charity without truth can become permission for further wrongdoing. Biblical love refuses both errors because it seeks what is righteous and genuinely beneficial.

The deepest answer is found in Jesus Christ, who saves sinners by grace through faith and calls redeemed people to walk in obedience. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is God's gift, not the reward for a successful recovery. But Titus 2:11–12 teaches that the grace bringing salvation also instructs believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly. That is the proper direction of the Christian life. The father enslaved to alcohol needs more than another excuse. The mother struggling with addiction needs genuine help and deliverance. The husband or wife causing harm must accept responsibility, and the family suffering from that conduct deserves protection and truth. There is still hope where sin has brought destruction, but hope must not be confused with pretending the destruction never happened. The home ought to be a place of love, instruction, faithfulness, and peace. It should never become a place where children dread the evening and spouses fear the sound of the front door. **The bottle may have one owner, but it can leave an entire family paying the price. And no Christian should be willing to purchase a moment of pleasure with the peace of the people God has entrusted to his care.**

5 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — One More for the Road: The Drunk Driver and the Lives That Never Came Home

Key Passage: Proverbs 14:12 — "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

There is a particular kind of foolishness that begins with a man holding a glass and ends with somebody else lying in a hospital bed. It starts with laughter, music, friends, and the confident announcement that everything is under control. The man has had a few drinks, but he knows his limits. He has driven this way before. He only lives a few miles away. He knows the roads. He has never had an accident. And if anybody questions his judgment, he becomes offended that his driving ability has been challenged. Proverbs 14:12 declares, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Notice that the way *seemeth right* to the individual traveling upon it. He is not necessarily expecting disaster. He may be perfectly satisfied with his decision until the moment when his automobile crosses the centerline. The trouble with trusting your judgment while intoxicated is that the very thing you are trusting has already been compromised. **A man who has surrendered his judgment to a bottle is in no condition to certify that his judgment remains sound.**

I have seen the consequences of drinking in homes, prisons, and hospitals, and there is an enormous difference between discussing intoxication around a dinner table and confronting what it has done after an automobile collision. In one setting, people argue about moderation, individual freedom, and whether the Bible permits a social drink. In the other, there are injured bodies, grieving families, criminal charges, and lives that will never return to what they were before. The consequences of impaired driving are not limited to the driver who made the decision. There may be a mother taking her children home, a husband returning from work, a teenager driving to school, or an elderly couple traveling to visit their grandchildren. None of those people agreed to participate in somebody else's experiment with alcohol and automobile keys. They did not attend his party, purchase his drinks, or approve his decision. Yet they may become the ones who pay the greatest price. The drunk driver makes a personal decision that can impose permanent consequences upon complete strangers.

This is not an argument that every automobile collision involves alcohol, that every person who drinks becomes a dangerous driver, or that every medication automatically makes someone unfit to operate a vehicle. The issue is knowingly placing oneself behind the wheel when alcohol, marijuana, illegal drugs, or impairing medications have compromised the faculties necessary for safe driving. Scripture does not mention automobiles by name, but it speaks plainly about wisdom, prudence, self-control, obedience to lawful authority, personal responsibility, and loving one's neighbour. Those principles are more than sufficient to condemn the deliberate endangerment of innocent people. Romans 13:10 declares, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” That verse has considerably more to say about impaired driving than all the excuses offered by somebody who wants one more drink before heading home. The road belongs to other people too. A Christian must never act as though the safety of his neighbour is less important than his own convenience.

1. There Is a Way Which Seemeth Right Until the Road Runs Out

Proverbs 14:12 is a statement of divine wisdom concerning the unreliability of human judgment when it operates contrary to truth. The book of Proverbs was given within the Old Testament setting of Israel, but its moral instruction exposes realities that remain unchanged throughout human history. A man can be absolutely convinced that he is making the correct decision while moving directly toward destruction. That is the danger of the way that “seemeth right.” The verse does not say the individual knows every consequence and consciously desires death. It shows that appearances and personal confidence are unreliable guides. Apply that principle to the intoxicated driver. He may sincerely believe he is sufficiently alert, coordinated, and capable of reaching home safely.

His sincerity does not restore his reaction time. His confidence does not improve his coordination. His previous success does not guarantee his next journey. An automobile is not impressed by the driver's confidence when the laws of motion have already taken control.

Consider the reasoning behind the familiar excuse, “I have done this a hundred times before.” What exactly does that prove? It proves that the individual has previously escaped a particular consequence, not that his conduct was wise. A man may cross railroad tracks against the warning signals repeatedly without encountering a train. That does not make the crossing safe; it merely means the train has not arrived during his foolishness. The same principle applies to driving while impaired. Previous journeys without a collision cannot establish that another journey will be harmless. Proverbs 27:1 warns, “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” Yet the intoxicated driver announces with extraordinary confidence that nothing serious will happen tonight. He does not know whether another vehicle will stop suddenly, whether a pedestrian will enter the roadway, or whether an unexpected hazard will appear. He knows less about the next five minutes than he imagines, but he is willing to gamble with lives that do not belong to him.

There is also a difference between an ordinary driving mistake and the deliberate decision to operate a vehicle while knowingly impaired. Every driver has limitations, and even careful people may face unavoidable accidents. But the person who has consumed enough alcohol or drugs to compromise his faculties has introduced an additional danger before the journey begins. He has knowingly weakened the judgment upon which safe driving depends. The foolishness occurs before the collision, before the police arrive, and before anybody is injured. It occurs when the individual chooses to drive despite having reason to know he is impaired. Some people imagine that the seriousness of a decision can be measured only by whether disaster eventually follows. Scripture does not teach that morality operates on such convenient terms. A dangerous decision does not become righteous merely because its consequences failed to arrive. **Getting home safely after driving impaired does not prove you were responsible. It proves that the people sharing the road were spared the possible consequences of your irresponsibility.**

2. The Prudent Man Foreseeth the Evil

Proverbs 22:3 declares, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” There is a tremendous difference between prudence and mere confidence. The prudent man recognizes danger before it overtakes him and takes reasonable steps to avoid it. The simple man proceeds as though awareness of danger were an unnecessary burden. Applied to impaired driving, the principle is plain. A

responsible person makes transportation arrangements before drinking, refuses to drive when his faculties are compromised, and recognizes that avoiding unnecessary danger is evidence of wisdom rather than cowardice. He does not need a police officer standing beside the automobile to make the decision for him. He possesses enough judgment to recognize that the safety of other people matters. The Bible does not praise the man who continually approaches a dangerous situation and boasts about escaping unharmed. It praises the individual who sees danger coming and acts accordingly. Prudence is cheaper than a funeral and considerably more useful than an apology afterward.

There is nothing spiritually impressive about insisting upon driving when a safe alternative is available. If a person intends to drink, transportation should be considered before the first glass, not after the final excuse. A sober designated driver, a taxi, a rideshare, or remaining safely where one is can prevent a decision from becoming a tragedy. The same principle applies when a person unexpectedly discovers that medication has affected alertness or coordination. Nobody should assume that a substance is safe for driving merely because it was obtained legally or prescribed by a physician. Instructions from qualified medical professionals, medication warnings, and applicable driving laws deserve serious attention. Taking necessary medicine is not inherently sinful, but operating dangerous machinery while knowingly impaired is another matter. A man who can plan an evening's entertainment but cannot plan a safe trip home has demonstrated an unusual arrangement of priorities. He has remembered the restaurant reservation, the favorite beverage, and the company, but somehow overlooked the responsibility of arriving home without endangering anybody.

The ancient law given to Israel contains an instructive example of preventive responsibility. Deuteronomy 22:8 commanded, “When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.” The specific construction requirement belonged to Israel under the Mosaic law, not to the Church as a building regulation. Nevertheless, the moral wisdom is unmistakable. A homeowner was expected to recognize a foreseeable danger and provide protection before somebody fell. God did not instruct the owner to wait until a visitor had been injured and then announce that accidents happen. The preventive principle has a straightforward application to driving. A responsible person should take reasonable precautions before exposing others to avoidable danger. If Israel was commanded to guard the edge of a roof, a Christian ought to understand the wisdom of keeping an impaired person away from the steering wheel. **The time to prevent a tragedy is before the ambulance is needed, not after the funeral arrangements begin.**

3. The Law Is Not Your Enemy Because It Takes Away Your Keys

Romans 13:1 declares, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” Paul is writing to believers living under Roman civil authority, and his instruction establishes the Christian's ordinary responsibility to submit to legitimate government. This does not mean every governmental decision is righteous or that civil authority may command disobedience to God. Acts 5:29 establishes that believers must obey God rather than men when those authorities conflict. But laws prohibiting impaired driving do not require a Christian to violate Scripture. They address conduct that endangers human life and public safety. Romans 13:3 explains that rulers are intended to be a terror to evil works rather than good, and verse 4 describes the authority as “the minister of God to thee for good.” The Christian who knowingly violates laws against impaired driving cannot justify his conduct by complaining that the government is interfering with his freedom.

There is something extraordinary about the fellow who becomes angry with the police officer for arresting him after he has been driving under the influence. He voluntarily placed others in danger, disregarded the law, and made a decision that could have destroyed innocent lives. Yet when the flashing lights appear, his greatest concern is that somebody has inconvenienced him. He may complain about the cost of legal representation, the loss of his driving privileges, the fines, or the possibility of imprisonment. Those consequences can be severe, but they should be considered before taking the keys. Romans 13:4 declares concerning civil authority, “for he beareth not the sword in vain.” The passage recognizes government's legitimate function in restraining wrongdoing. A drunk driver should not expect the civil authorities to congratulate him for avoiding a collision before they stopped him. The law does not have to wait for a body to be discovered before treating dangerous conduct seriously.

Christians must also distinguish between forgiveness before God and accountability under civil law. A believer who sins may confess his wrongdoing and receive forgiveness, but that does not automatically cancel criminal charges or legal consequences. David's experience following his grievous sins in 2 Samuel 12 demonstrates that divine forgiveness and earthly consequences are not identical. His circumstances belonged to Israel's monarchy, yet the distinction remains instructive. A driver responsible for an intoxication-related injury cannot simply announce that God has forgiven him and therefore everybody else must dismiss the matter. The injured person may still require medical care, the family may still suffer losses, and the government may still have a legitimate duty to administer justice. First Peter 2:13–14 likewise instructs believers concerning submission to lawful ordinances and governors. A Christian ought to be known for responsible conduct, not for using religious language to escape accountability. **The blood of Jesus Christ saves sinners; it**

was never intended to become an excuse for breaking the law and endangering your neighbour.

4. Love Thy Neighbour Means the Family in the Other Lane

Romans 13:10 declares, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” The immediate context concerns the believer's obligations toward others, including the commandments against adultery, killing, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting. Paul summarizes the moral responsibility involved through the command to love one's neighbour as oneself. He is not teaching that salvation comes through keeping the Mosaic law; Romans has already established justification by faith apart from the deeds of the law. He is explaining that Christian love does not deliberately injure the people whom God commands us to regard with charity. The principle applies directly to conduct upon public roads. A driver has responsibilities toward people he has never met and may never recognize by name. Their lives possess value regardless of whether they belong to his family, his church, or his circle of friends. Loving one's neighbour means more than smiling at people during Sunday worship. It includes refusing to create unnecessary danger for strangers on Monday night.

Imagine the family traveling in the opposite lane. The father has spent the day working, the mother is thinking about tomorrow's responsibilities, and the children are discussing something that happened at school. They are ordinary people engaged in ordinary life. They do not know that a driver approaching from the opposite direction has been drinking, using marijuana, or combining substances that compromise his ability to operate a vehicle. They have no opportunity to examine his judgment, negotiate with his appetite, or remind him of his responsibilities. Yet their safety may depend upon the decision he made before leaving his gathering. Philippians 2:4 declares, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” That instruction occurs within Paul's teaching concerning humility and the mind of Christ. A person who thinks only about getting himself home has ignored the interests of everyone else sharing the road. The other family's journey matters just as much as his own.

The Lord Jesus Christ illustrated genuine neighbourly concern in Luke 10 through the account of the man who fell among thieves and was helped by the Samaritan. The Samaritan did not merely express sympathy from a comfortable distance. He intervened, tended the injured man, arranged transportation, and provided for his continuing care. The lesson concerns mercy shown to a person in need. Now consider the contradiction of someone who claims to love his neighbour while knowingly increasing the danger of injuring that neighbour. A Christian should be willing to help the wounded, but he ought to be even more determined not to become the cause of needless injury. There is nothing

admirable about praying for God's protection over innocent travelers while deliberately making the highway more dangerous for them. The golden rule does not become suspended when an automobile engine starts. **You would not willingly place your children in front of an impaired driver. Why should another man's children be expected to take that chance with you?**

5. Alcohol, Marijuana, and the Dangerous Excuse of Legal Intoxication

Alcohol is not the only substance capable of compromising the ability to drive. Marijuana, illegal drugs, sedatives, certain pain medications, and other substances can impair attention, coordination, perception, or reaction time. The particular effects differ according to the substance, amount, individual, and circumstances, but the moral principle remains unchanged. A driver who knowingly operates a vehicle while impaired is not excused because the impairment came from something other than whiskey. Nor does the legality of a substance establish that driving under its influence is acceptable. Some people appear to believe that once a government permits the possession or use of marijuana, every moral question surrounding its effects has been settled. That is an interesting theory, but government permission to possess a substance does not confer supernatural driving ability upon the user. The Bible calls believers to sobriety and sound judgment, not to an endless search for legal classifications that might excuse recklessness.

First Peter 5:8 declares, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” In its immediate context, Peter is exhorting believers to spiritual watchfulness in the face of the adversary. He is not delivering a modern traffic regulation. Nevertheless, the command demonstrates the biblical importance of alertness and sober-minded conduct. A Christian should not deliberately impair the judgment necessary for a responsibility that may involve life and death. Prescription medications require careful distinctions because their legitimate medical use is not equivalent to recreational drug abuse. A person receiving necessary treatment should follow appropriate medical guidance, and some medications may be safely used without compromising driving ability. Others carry serious warnings. Where impairment is present or reasonably suspected, the responsible decision is not to drive. Necessary treatment deserves respect, but a medical prescription is not a certificate declaring every possible activity safe.

There is another excuse that deserves particular attention: “I don't feel impaired.” Personal sensation is not a reliable measurement of every faculty necessary for driving. Alcohol and other intoxicants can compromise judgment while also making the individual less capable of recognizing the extent of that compromise. A person may feel confident while reacting more slowly or overlooking hazards that a sober driver would recognize. Combining

substances can create additional risks, and somebody who has consumed alcohol along with an impairing medication should never assume that each substance's effects remain separate and harmless. Proverbs 3:7 declares, “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.” The warning against self-sufficient judgment applies with particular force when the judgment itself may be impaired. There is no biblical virtue in conducting a roadside experiment to discover whether a person has consumed too much. **The fact that a substance is legal does not mean your reaction time has received legal permission to slow down.**

6. The Friend Who Hands Over the Keys Shares a Serious Responsibility

Habakkuk 2:15 declares, “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!” In its prophetic setting, the verse condemns wickedness associated with humiliation and exploitation, and it must not be misrepresented as a modern statute addressing every person who serves alcohol. Nevertheless, Scripture plainly exposes the evil of deliberately encouraging another person's intoxication for shameful purposes. A person who knowingly pressures somebody to continue drinking and then encourages that individual to drive has demonstrated a dreadful disregard for human life. The question is not whether every host possesses complete control over every guest's decisions. Adults remain responsible for their own conduct. But knowingly assisting or encouraging a dangerously impaired person to take the wheel is not an innocent expression of hospitality. A friend who genuinely cares about somebody's welfare ought to be willing to risk an uncomfortable conversation before allowing a preventable disaster.

Suppose a man at a gathering is visibly impaired and announces that he intends to drive home. His companions recognize the danger, but nobody wants to offend him. Somebody laughs, another tells him to be careful, and a third assures everyone that he has probably driven in worse condition before. What an astonishing collection of excuses! They can recognize the danger well enough to discuss it, but apparently not well enough to do anything about it. Proverbs 24:11 declares, “If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain.” The following verse confronts the excuse of claiming ignorance when responsibility has become apparent. The passage is not a substitute for every circumstance requiring individual judgment, but its moral warning is serious. Where a person can safely intervene, offering transportation, preventing access to a vehicle without violence, or contacting appropriate authorities may protect lives. Genuine friendship sometimes requires doing what is right when doing what is popular would be considerably easier.

There is also wisdom in recognizing that intervention must not create another dangerous confrontation. Nobody should physically endanger himself or vulnerable family members by wrestling with a violent intoxicated person over automobile keys. Where a threat is immediate, appropriate emergency assistance may be necessary. But a Christian should never confuse avoiding unnecessary personal danger with indifference toward the lives of others. James 4:17 declares, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” The verse establishes personal accountability for knowingly neglecting what is right. It does not make every bystander automatically responsible for another adult's criminal conduct, but it should challenge the person who could reasonably have helped and deliberately chose not to bother. The wise friend offers a safe ride instead of another drink. The faithful companion speaks plainly instead of laughing at recklessness. **A true friend would rather have you angry with him tonight than have your family standing beside your grave tomorrow.**

7. The Harvest of a Decision That Cannot Be Taken Back

Galatians 6:7–8 declares, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Paul is writing to believers concerning the moral consequences of conduct and the difference between living according to the flesh and the Spirit. He is not teaching that salvation is earned through careful driving or forfeited through a single sinful decision. The believer's eternal salvation rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ, received by grace through faith. But eternal security does not remove earthly accountability. A saved man may commit a terrible act of foolishness and suffer consequences that cannot be reversed during this life. The Lord may forgive his sin without restoring the life of somebody who died because of it. A man who sows recklessness should not imagine that the harvest becomes harmless simply because he regrets planting the seed.

Consider the aftermath of a serious collision involving an impaired driver. There may be emergency responders attempting to save lives, physicians treating catastrophic injuries, investigators determining what occurred, and families receiving news they never expected to hear. A survivor may face permanent disability, repeated medical treatment, the loss of employment, or the death of a loved one. The responsible driver may face criminal prosecution, imprisonment, financial liability, and lifelong remorse. Those consequences are not guaranteed in every case, and every collision must be examined according to its actual circumstances. But the possibility is serious enough that nobody should dismiss it as an unlikely inconvenience. The greatest tragedy is not that a drunk driver's reputation might be ruined. It is that innocent people may lose lives, health, security, and

relationships because of a decision they never made. There are consequences that money cannot repair, prison cannot reverse, and an apology cannot remove. The courtroom may eventually close its case, but the empty chair at the family table remains.

There must also be a clear distinction between the guilt of a reckless driver and the suffering of innocent victims. Galatians 6:7 is not permission to accuse the injured family of reaping some secret sin. Scripture never teaches that every tragedy is evidence of personal wrongdoing by the person who suffers. In John 9:1–3, Jesus rejected the disciples' assumption that the man's blindness could be explained by assigning blame to his personal sin or that of his parents. Likewise, the family injured by an intoxicated driver must not be subjected to foolish religious speculation concerning why God allowed the tragedy. Their suffering deserves compassion, practical assistance, prayer, and justice where wrongdoing has occurred. Romans 12:15 commands believers to “weep with them that weep.” That is not a difficult instruction to understand, although some people seem determined to replace compassion with a lecture. The Christian should comfort victims, uphold righteousness, and avoid speaking as though every painful event can be explained by attaching a convenient accusation to the people enduring it.

Conclusion — The Last Drink May Be the Last Decision

There is a dreadful difference between the confidence of an intoxicated driver before leaving a gathering and the consequences that may follow when his automobile enters public traffic. Before the journey, he may insist that he is perfectly capable of driving, that his home is nearby, and that everybody is worrying unnecessarily. After a collision, those assurances provide no comfort to the injured, no restoration to the bereaved, and no defense against the moral responsibility of knowingly endangering others. Proverbs 14:12 warns that a way may seem right while its end leads toward death. Proverbs 22:3 commends the prudent man who recognizes danger and acts to avoid it. Romans 13 establishes the legitimacy of civil authority, while Romans 13:10 commands love that does no ill to a neighbour. These passages do not need to mention the automobile by name to establish the responsibility of the person operating it. The moral issue was settled long before the internal combustion engine was invented.

Every person who drinks alcohol, uses marijuana, takes potentially impairing medication, or consumes another substance capable of compromising driving ability must take that responsibility seriously. The proper response is not to discover how much impairment can be concealed, how close one may come to the legal limit, or how confidently one can persuade friends that everything is fine. The proper response is to refuse to operate a vehicle when judgment or coordination is compromised and to make safe transportation arrangements before the danger arises. Christians should be especially conscious of their

example because their testimony concerns the Lord Jesus Christ. A man cannot reasonably preach love for his neighbour while deliberately gambling with that neighbour's life upon the highway. Nor should his family be expected to accept reckless driving as an ordinary part of his recreation. **You can replace an automobile, repair a damaged fence, and pay a traffic fine. But there are families who would surrender everything they possess for one more evening with the person who never came home.**

The answer to sin remains the gospel of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is received by grace through faith, not earned through a lifetime of respectable conduct. But the grace of God does not teach believers to excuse selfishness, ignore danger, or disregard the lives of others. Titus 2:11–12 declares that saving grace instructs Christians to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. A Christian who has driven impaired should stop making excuses, take responsibility, and abandon the practice before another life is endangered. Those suffering from addiction may require qualified treatment and practical assistance, and seeking such help is no denial of faith. The person injured by another's conduct deserves protection, compassion, and appropriate justice. The final warning is simple enough for a child to understand and serious enough for every adult to obey. **A man may choose to drink, but the family approaching him on the opposite side of the highway never consented to his decision. Their lives are worth more than his last drink.**

6 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — Getting High and Calling It Harmless: Marijuana, Street Drugs, and the Sober Mind

Key Passage: 1 Peter 5:8 — "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"

There is something remarkably convenient about a generation that has learned to rename nearly every form of intoxication until the sin and danger are practically invisible beneath the vocabulary. Getting drunk is socializing, getting high is relaxing, taking drugs to escape reality is unwinding, and developing a dependence upon a substance is merely having a personal preference. The language keeps getting prettier while the consequences remain as ugly as ever. A man can cloud his judgment, surrender his alertness, neglect his responsibilities, and spend his evenings deliberately altering his mind, but apparently nobody is supposed to question the practice because society has decided to call it recreation. Well, the Holy Ghost was not waiting for the latest cultural terminology before

giving the Church instructions concerning sobriety. First Peter 5:8 declares, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” God commands sobriety and vigilance. The modern drug culture advertises intoxication and escape. Those are not exactly traveling in the same direction.

The controversy has become particularly pronounced with marijuana. As laws have changed in various places and public attitudes have become more accepting, some people have concluded that the moral question has somehow been settled. Marijuana is described as natural, harmless, medicinal, relaxing, or simply another adult choice that nobody has any right to examine. Meanwhile, recreational users of other substances offer their own explanations. One drug provides energy, another promises pleasure, another produces unusual perceptions, and still another supposedly makes life's difficulties easier to endure. The substances differ, the consequences differ, and not everybody who experiments with a drug becomes addicted. Those distinctions must be acknowledged. But there is a common spiritual question that cannot be avoided: Why would a Christian deliberately seek an intoxicating influence that compromises the very faculties Scripture commands him to exercise? The believer is repeatedly instructed to possess a sober mind, practice temperance, and walk circumspectly. There is something dreadfully inconsistent about celebrating the temporary surrender of judgment while claiming to be governed by the word of God.

This examination must distinguish genuine medical treatment from recreational drug use. A patient receiving appropriate medication for pain, surgery, illness, or another legitimate medical need is not automatically committing sin because the treatment affects the nervous system. Scripture recognizes bodily infirmities and practical remedies. But the medical use of a substance cannot become a blanket justification for using it recreationally, and the misuse of prescriptions cannot be excused merely because a physician sometimes prescribes the same class of medication. The question demands careful biblical distinctions rather than careless accusations. We will examine marijuana, illegal stimulants, opioids, hallucinogens, and the larger culture that treats chemical intoxication as an ordinary pursuit of happiness. We will also consider the believer's responsibility toward family, testimony, lawful authority, and the body purchased by Jesus Christ. The purpose is not to manufacture commandments the Bible never gave. It is to expose the folly of deliberately surrendering one's faculties while the Book commands believers to remain sober. **Getting high does not bring a man closer to heaven merely because it temporarily lifts his mind above his troubles.**

1. Be Sober, Be Vigilant: God Did Not Command a Clouded Mind

First Peter 5:8 begins with two unmistakable commands: “Be sober, be vigilant.” Peter is writing to believers scattered throughout several provinces of Asia Minor, addressing their conduct, suffering, faith, and responsibility to remain steadfast under opposition. The immediate warning concerns the devil, who seeks opportunities to destroy and devour. The passage is not a medical instruction concerning the precise effects of every intoxicating substance, and honesty requires acknowledging that distinction. Nevertheless, its spiritual command has obvious implications for the believer's conduct. Sobriety involves sound-mindedness, seriousness, and the ability to exercise proper judgment. Vigilance demands watchfulness rather than careless indifference. A Christian should not deliberately pursue conditions that make those responsibilities harder to fulfill. If a watchman is commanded to remain alert while an enemy approaches, he has no business deliberately impairing his faculties and then congratulating himself for enjoying a peaceful evening. A sleeping guard does not become faithful merely because he enjoyed his nap.

The warning becomes even more searching when Peter identifies the adversary. The devil is not presented as a harmless companion looking for entertainment. He is described as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Peter continues in verse 9, “Whom resist stedfast in the faith,” showing that believers must exercise spiritual resistance and steadfastness. The passage does not mean that every person who uses marijuana or another drug is literally inviting a demon into his body. Scripture does not authorize such careless accusations. But neither does it permit Christians to treat impaired judgment as a spiritual achievement. Temptation, foolish decisions, sexual immorality, reckless behavior, and neglect of responsibilities do not become easier to resist when a person deliberately reduces his alertness. A man who recognizes that temptation surrounds him should be concerned about maintaining his judgment, not experimenting with how much of that judgment he can temporarily surrender. The Christian life is a spiritual conflict, not a vacation from the need for discernment.

There is a remarkable inconsistency in the person who claims to take spiritual warfare seriously while treating recreational intoxication as harmless. He warns others about the devil, discusses the dangers of the world, and insists that believers must remain watchful. Then he deliberately pursues an experience intended to alter his awareness and judgment. The obvious contradiction deserves examination. Ephesians 6:11 commands believers to “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” That instruction belongs to Paul's direct teaching concerning spiritual warfare within the Church. The armour is spiritual, not a collection of physical equipment, but the requirement to stand remains unmistakable. A soldier who removes his equipment because he wants a more comfortable experience has misunderstood the purpose of the armour. Likewise, a believer should not spend his life searching for ways to make vigilance

optional. **The devil does not need to steal a man's watchfulness when the man is perfectly willing to surrender it for an evening's entertainment.**

2. Children of the Day Have No Business Celebrating the Darkness

First Thessalonians 5:6 declares, “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” Paul is addressing a New Testament congregation concerning the day of the Lord, the believer's relationship to coming judgment, and the necessity of spiritual watchfulness. The surrounding passage distinguishes the children of light from those living in darkness. Verse 5 declares, “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” The Church is not appointed to the wrath associated with that coming judgment, as verse 9 makes plain, but its blessed position in Christ does not justify spiritual carelessness. The believer's identity should govern his conduct. Paul does not instruct Christians to live like the darkness around them until the Lord returns. He commands them to remain awake, watchful, and sober. That is not a fashionable standard in a culture determined to celebrate every available method of chemical escape, but the Lord never established His commandments by consulting public opinion.

First Thessalonians 5:7 continues, “For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.” Paul employs ordinary human experiences to reinforce the contrast between light and darkness, watchfulness and carelessness, sobriety and drunkenness. The passage does not teach that every person awake after sunset is wicked or that every medical treatment affecting consciousness is sinful. Its concern is the spiritual condition and proper conduct of believers. Nevertheless, drunkenness is plainly associated with the behavior of darkness rather than the watchfulness expected of God's children. How peculiar, then, that some Christians want to make recreational intoxication a respectable expression of their freedom. They will argue endlessly that they have the right to alter their faculties, yet the apostle repeatedly instructs them to remain sober. The darkness does not become light because somebody installs decorative lamps around the party. A worldly practice does not become spiritually profitable simply because a professing Christian has learned to defend it with religious vocabulary.

Verse 8 declares, “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.” Notice how sobriety appears alongside faith, love, and hope. Paul is describing the proper condition of people whose lives are governed by their relationship to Jesus Christ. The believer is not expected to manufacture artificial confidence through substances or pursue chemical intoxication as an answer to every difficulty. Second Timothy 1:7 likewise declares that God has given believers “the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” That verse must not be

twisted into a promise that Christians will never suffer illness or require medical assistance. But it certainly reveals the value God places upon sound-minded conduct. The Christian ought to desire clear judgment, obedient thinking, and disciplined behavior. **The world says, "Lose yourself for a little while." Scripture tells the believer to remember who he is in Jesus Christ.** Those are two entirely different philosophies of living.

3. Marijuana Became Legal in Some Places; That Did Not Make It Holy

One of the weakest arguments offered in defense of recreational marijuana is that it has become legal in various jurisdictions. Since when did the government possess authority to determine whether something is spiritually profitable? Civil law has legitimate responsibilities, and Christians are ordinarily commanded to obey lawful authority. Romans 13:1 establishes that responsibility. But legality and righteousness are not interchangeable. A government may permit conduct that Scripture condemns, regulate conduct that Scripture does not expressly address, or establish restrictions intended to protect public welfare. None of those decisions makes the government the final authority over Christian holiness. The believer must consider both his responsibility under applicable law and the moral instruction of God's word. A recreational drug does not receive a certificate of spiritual approval merely because voters, legislators, or officials have changed its legal classification. The state may change a regulation overnight. It cannot amend First Peter 5:8, and it has never possessed authority to repeal First Corinthians 6:12.

Another familiar argument is that marijuana is natural, as though something originating from a plant must therefore be harmless or morally acceptable. Well, poison ivy is natural, and nobody with any sense rubs it over his face to celebrate the goodness of creation. The fact that a substance originates in nature does not establish that every preparation, quantity, or use is wise. Genesis 1 declares God's creation good, but Scripture also records the entrance of sin into the world and the continuing necessity of discernment. Natural substances can nourish, heal, intoxicate, injure, or kill, depending upon their properties and use. Marijuana preparations also differ considerably in strength and effect, and their influence upon attention, coordination, perception, and judgment cannot simply be dismissed. Some users experience serious adverse reactions or dependence, while others do not develop the same difficulties. The Bible does not require exaggerated claims to establish a sound principle. **A plant does not become a commandment merely because somebody discovers that smoking it makes him feel good.**

The practical question is whether a person is deliberately seeking intoxication. Some individuals use cannabinoid-based treatments under medical supervision for legitimate conditions, and those circumstances require separate consideration. But the person

pursuing a recreational high should not conceal his purpose beneath the existence of medical uses. A substance may have a therapeutic application and also be misused for intoxication. First Corinthians 10:31 declares, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” That command demands more serious examination than simply asking whether a government permits the substance. Parents should especially consider the example they establish before their children. A father who repeatedly seeks an intoxicating experience while instructing his children to exercise sound judgment has created a contradiction that deserves attention. A mother who dismisses impairment as harmless recreation should not be surprised when her children begin questioning the standards she teaches. Children may not imitate every parental mistake, but they certainly observe the difference between instruction and conduct. Christian testimony begins where excuses end.

4. The Chemical Escape Route Has More Than One Entrance

The modern drug culture offers an assortment of substances promising different experiences. Stimulants may produce energy, excitement, or a temporary sense of confidence. Opioids may produce pain relief and, when misused, pleasurable effects that encourage repeated consumption. Hallucinogens can alter perception and produce experiences that users may find fascinating, frightening, or spiritually significant. Sedatives and other depressants can reduce alertness and slow ordinary responses. These substances are not medically identical, and their risks cannot honestly be reduced to one convenient description. Some can produce severe dependence, overdose, dangerous cardiovascular effects, or profound impairment. Others involve different patterns of harm. But the moral issue confronting recreational intoxication remains serious. The person deliberately seeking chemical escape is choosing to alter faculties that God expects him to govern responsibly. Proverbs 4:23 declares, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” Guarding one's inner life is not accomplished by deliberately surrendering sound judgment whenever reality becomes unpleasant.

There is also no biblical warrant for claiming that every individual who experiments with marijuana will inevitably progress to heroin, cocaine, or another dangerous drug. That argument goes beyond what the facts establish and weakens an otherwise legitimate warning. Some people never make that progression. Others develop serious problems with marijuana itself, while still others move into dangerous patterns involving multiple substances. The absence of an inevitable progression does not make the initial conduct wise. A man does not need to descend every stairway into a cellar before being warned about the first broken step. First Corinthians 15:33 declares, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” The immediate context concerns the influence of

those denying the resurrection, but the principle also demonstrates that company and teaching can influence conduct. A person surrounded by companions who celebrate intoxication and ridicule sobriety should recognize the danger of that influence. **You do not have to visit every depth of a pit to establish that climbing down into it was a foolish idea.**

The deeper problem is the attempt to make an intoxicating experience the answer to circumstances that ought to be faced with wisdom, responsibility, and legitimate help. The person has difficulties at work, conflicts at home, disappointments, fears, or ordinary weariness. Instead of confronting those matters, he discovers a substance that temporarily changes how he experiences them. But the difficulty does not necessarily disappear because his awareness has been altered. The unpaid bill remains, the neglected responsibility remains, and the strained marriage may become worse if intoxication contributes additional misconduct. This does not mean every person using drugs is deliberately fleeing responsibility; motives and circumstances differ. But when chemical escape becomes the established response to life's burdens, the habit deserves honest examination. Psalm 55:22 instructs, “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee.” The verse does not forbid legitimate medical treatment or practical assistance. It does remind God's people where their confidence ultimately belongs. A temporary high cannot provide the enduring faithfulness of the living God.

5. Medicine Is Not the Enemy, but Abuse Is Not Medical Treatment

The distinction between legitimate medicine and recreational intoxication is essential to faithful biblical teaching. In Luke 10:34, the Samaritan tending an injured man poured oil and wine into his wounds and bound them up. The Lord Jesus Christ used that account to illustrate neighbourly mercy, and the practical care given to the wounded man was presented favorably. Colossians 4:14 identifies Luke as “the beloved physician,” without condemning his medical occupation. First Timothy 5:23 records Paul's instruction to Timothy: “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.” These passages do not establish that every modern medical practice is wise or that every prescription is beyond question. They do establish that Scripture does not treat appropriate bodily care as rebellion against God. A person undergoing surgery, receiving necessary pain treatment, or using properly prescribed medication should not be accused of sin merely because the treatment affects consciousness, sensation, or the nervous system.

Nevertheless, the existence of legitimate medical uses cannot transform recreational drug abuse into righteousness. There is an obvious difference between receiving medication to treat severe pain and obtaining the same class of substance primarily for an intoxicating

effect. A patient may need carefully supervised treatment while another person deliberately misuses a drug in dangerous quantities or combinations. Some drugs carry risks of tolerance, dependence, withdrawal, or overdose even when originally prescribed for a genuine condition. Physical dependence arising during appropriate treatment is not automatically evidence of sinful behavior or addiction. These distinctions matter because careless accusations can burden people who are already suffering. At the same time, the person deliberately misusing medication should not hide behind the experience of legitimate patients. First Corinthians 6:12 declares, “I will not be brought under the power of any.” That principle requires serious consideration when a substance begins governing decisions, defeating responsibilities, or producing destructive conduct. Medical necessity deserves honesty, and deliberate misuse deserves honesty too.

Christians also need enough biblical common sense to recognize that stopping certain substances abruptly can be dangerous. A person dependent upon alcohol, sedatives, or other drugs may require qualified medical assessment and supervised withdrawal. Some withdrawal conditions can become life-threatening, and nobody should be encouraged to abandon essential medication or attempt a dangerous withdrawal merely to prove the sincerity of repentance. Seeking appropriate medical care is not evidence that the power of God has failed. The Lord can work through ordinary means, responsible physicians, appropriate treatment, and the faithful support of believers. James 5:16 commands Christians to pray for one another, and prayer should accompany rather than automatically displace necessary care. There is no contradiction between admitting sin where sin exists and recognizing legitimate bodily dependence requiring medical attention. The Christian who condemns all treatment because he dislikes drug abuse has confused the physician's work with the drug dealer's business. **The medicine cabinet was never intended to become a recreational playground, but neither was the hospital established as an enemy of faith.**

6. All Things Are Lawful, but I Will Not Be Brought Under Their Power

First Corinthians 6:12 declares, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” Paul is addressing believers in a Corinthian church surrounded by idolatry, immorality, and the temptations of a corrupt Gentile society. His declaration cannot mean that every conceivable action is morally permissible, because the surrounding chapter expressly condemns unrighteous conduct. Instead, Paul establishes that Christian liberty must remain subject to spiritual profit and personal mastery. The believer cannot simply announce that a practice is legal or culturally accepted and therefore beyond examination. He must ask whether it is expedient and whether it has gained power over him.

Recreational drug use deserves particular scrutiny because some substances can produce dependence or patterns of compulsive use. A man who insists that he is perfectly free while arranging his responsibilities around the next opportunity to get high should examine whether he still possesses the freedom he celebrates.

There is something revealing about the person who declares that marijuana or another intoxicating substance means nothing to him, then becomes furious whenever someone suggests that he might be better off without it. Why does surrendering an unnecessary pleasure appear so threatening? Why must every concern be dismissed as ignorance, legalism, or an attack upon personal freedom? Those reactions do not prove addiction, and some individuals may disagree sincerely about the moral implications of particular substances. But the believer's willingness to examine his habits remains a legitimate question. Proverbs 25:28 declares, “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” Self-government matters. The man who can refuse temptation exercises greater freedom than the man who continually obeys appetite while insisting that nobody has authority to question him. **If a substance is only an optional pleasure, why does the suggestion of living without it sometimes sound like a declaration of war?** A liberty worth defending should not require surrendering the freedom to say no.

Addiction and relapse also require serious biblical and practical attention. Some people develop destructive dependence upon substances that initially appeared manageable. Others begin using drugs under circumstances involving legitimate medical treatment and later struggle with dependence or misuse. These experiences are not identical, and every person should be treated according to the actual circumstances rather than subjected to careless assumptions. But where sin has entered, repentance must not be replaced with an endless collection of excuses. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore one overtaken in a fault “in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Restoration requires truth, humility, accountability, and patient assistance. It may involve medical treatment, addiction counseling, avoiding companions who encourage drug use, and making difficult changes to daily routines. A struggling Christian should never be told that one relapse automatically proves he was never saved. Neither should repeated relapse become an excuse for abandoning responsibility. The believer needs a path toward genuine freedom, not another religious argument explaining why his bondage should be left undisturbed.

7. Make Not Provision for the Flesh: Grace Demands a Different Walk

Romans 13:13–14 commands, “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on

the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Paul is writing direct instruction concerning the Christian's conduct, and the contrast between the works of darkness and a life governed by Christ is unmistakable. The believer is not instructed to maintain a supply of temptation while congratulating himself for resisting it occasionally. He is told not to make provision for the flesh. That principle reaches into the habits, companions, locations, and decisions that encourage sinful conduct. A person seriously seeking freedom from recreational intoxication should consider whether he is continually arranging opportunities to return to the same practice. There is little wisdom in asking God for victory over a destructive appetite while carefully preserving every convenience necessary to feed it. Repentance should change more than the vocabulary used to describe the habit.

Galatians 5:19–21 identifies drunkenness and revellings among the works of the flesh, together with other sins that demonstrate the corruption of fallen human nature. The passage also includes witchcraft, but it would be careless to claim that this single word explicitly condemns every modern pharmaceutical product or establishes that all medically prescribed drugs constitute occult practice. The Bible must not be forced to say what it does not say. What the passage clearly condemns is drunkenness, along with the sinful conduct identified in the surrounding list. Recreational intoxication must be considered under that warning and the broader commands concerning sobriety, temperance, and self-control. Verse 21 contains a serious warning concerning those who practice such things and the inheritance of the kingdom of God. That warning must not be turned into salvation by works or used to deny the eternal security of the believer in Christ. Yet eternal security is no permission to embrace the works of the flesh. A Christian should not make peace with conduct God has commanded him to reject.

Titus 2:11–12 declares, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." There is the answer to those who imagine that preaching sobriety somehow contradicts the gospel of grace. Grace does not merely rescue the sinner from condemnation; it instructs the saved person concerning the life he ought to live. Salvation is not obtained through abstaining from drugs, and no man can purchase eternal life by maintaining a spotless record of outward conduct. But the grace that saves believers also teaches them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Notice that Paul says "in this present world." The command applies precisely where temptation, cultural pressure, and sinful opportunities exist. God has not postponed Christian holiness until the believer reaches heaven. **Grace is not God's permission for the flesh to remain in charge. It is God's instruction that the redeemed man should no longer live as though his appetites own him.**

Conclusion — A Sound Mind Is Worth More Than a Temporary High

The modern drug culture has built an impressive collection of explanations for practices that deserve serious moral examination. Marijuana is defended because it is natural or legal in some places. Recreational drug use is excused because it supposedly provides harmless entertainment. Dangerous indulgence is renamed relaxation, and chemical escape is presented as personal freedom. Yet none of those arguments overturns the biblical commands to be sober, vigilant, temperate, and obedient. The Christian must distinguish legitimate medical treatment from deliberate intoxication, refuse exaggerated claims about the inevitable consequences of every substance, and recognize that individuals experience different risks. But those necessary distinctions do not eliminate the moral question. Why should a believer deliberately pursue an altered condition that compromises judgment when Scripture repeatedly emphasizes sound-mindedness? Why should a temporary sensation become more important than a clear conscience, a faithful testimony, and the responsibilities God has placed upon him? **The world may change the name of the drug, the method of consumption, and the laws governing its possession. It cannot change the commandments of God.**

There are people whose lives have been devastated by recreational drug use, families that have endured repeated suffering, and believers who desperately desire freedom from habits they once considered harmless. Such individuals need more than ridicule, condemnation, or religious slogans. They need the truth of Scripture, practical accountability, appropriate medical assistance when necessary, and the faithful support of Christians who understand that restoration requires both righteousness and charity. A person struggling with addiction must not be encouraged to conceal the problem or attempt dangerous withdrawal without proper medical guidance. Nor should anyone be taught that overcoming an addiction is the means by which eternal salvation is obtained. First Corinthians 15:3–4 identifies the gospel in the death of Christ for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection the third day. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not works. But the same Saviour who receives sinners by grace calls redeemed people to walk in newness of life. The person seeking deliverance should find Christians prepared to speak plainly about sin while helping him pursue genuine freedom.

The final question is not whether the world has found another attractive explanation for getting high. It is whether the Christian intends to submit his mind, body, and conduct to the authority of Jesus Christ. First Peter 5:8 still commands sobriety and vigilance. First Thessalonians 5 still identifies believers as children of the light. First Corinthians 6:12 still warns against being brought under the power of anything. Romans 13 still commands Christians to make no provision for the flesh, and Titus 2 still teaches that grace produces

sober and godly living. Those Scriptures have not become obsolete because the culture has discovered new substances, new advertisements, or new methods of intoxication. A man may spend considerable effort defending his right to escape reality for a few hours, but the responsibilities waiting when the effects wear off remain his own. The believer has something better than a temporary high: an eternal Saviour, an inspired Bible, and a calling to walk in the light. **The flesh wants permission to escape reality. God commands His children to face it with a sound mind, a clear conscience, and confidence in the living Christ. You do not need to lose your mind to find peace, and you certainly do not need to get high to walk with the Most High.**

7 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — Medicine or Master? Prescription Drugs, Pain Relief, and the Danger of Dependence

Key Passage: 1 Timothy 5:23 — "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."

There is something profoundly foolish about a man who believes that taking necessary medicine demonstrates a lack of faith while he sits in an air-conditioned house, wearing prescription eyeglasses, eating food purchased from a grocery store, and enjoying the benefits of modern conveniences. Apparently, God is permitted to use electricians, plumbers, farmers, and automobile mechanics, but the moment a physician enters the room, faith must pack its bags and leave. That is not Bible doctrine. That is religious foolishness wearing a necktie. First Timothy 5:23 records the apostle Paul telling Timothy, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." There is no rebuke for Timothy's physical condition, no accusation that he lacked sufficient spirituality, and no command to ignore his recurring infirmities. Paul recommended a practical remedy for an actual bodily problem. That single verse ought to settle the ridiculous notion that every substance used medicinally must be condemned merely because it can affect the body.

But there is another ditch on the opposite side of the road, and plenty of people have managed to drive straight into it. Some individuals assume that anything obtained through a physician, dispensed by a pharmacy, or placed inside a prescription bottle must automatically be harmless, necessary, and beyond moral examination. That is equally foolish. A prescription label does not abolish personal responsibility, and a medical purpose does not justify deliberately misusing a substance for intoxication. Pain medications can be abused, sedatives can be taken improperly, stimulants can be used for

purposes other than legitimate treatment, and individuals can become dependent upon substances they originally received for genuine medical needs. Some develop serious addiction, while others experience physical dependence without engaging in addictive behavior. Those distinctions matter. The problem is not the existence of medicine. The problem begins when a substance intended to serve a legitimate purpose is misused, obtained dishonestly, or permitted to become a destructive master. **The difference between medicine and bondage is not always found in the bottle. Sometimes it is revealed by the purpose, the conduct, and the control surrounding its use.**

This subject demands more careful biblical judgment than either extreme usually provides. The believer undergoing surgery should not be condemned for receiving anesthesia. The patient receiving necessary treatment for severe pain should not be accused of seeking worldly pleasure merely because the medication can also produce intoxication when abused. A Christian receiving psychiatric treatment should not be told that appropriate medication automatically proves spiritual failure. At the same time, the person swallowing additional pills for the pleasure of their effects cannot hide behind the existence of legitimate patients. Scripture recognizes bodily weakness, commands wisdom, warns against intoxication, and forbids believers to become servants of their appetites. First Corinthians 6:12 declares, “I will not be brought under the power of any.” That is a searching principle, but it must be handled honestly. Necessary treatment is not automatically sinful bondage, and physical dependence arising during proper care is not necessarily addiction. The objective is to preserve both truths: God has not forbidden responsible medical treatment, and He has not authorized the misuse of medicine as an excuse for surrendering sober judgment.

1. Paul's Prescription to Timothy: A Little Wine for a Real Infirmity

First Timothy 5:23 deserves careful examination because it is frequently mishandled by people standing on opposite sides of the controversy over alcohol and medicine. Paul writes, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.” The historical setting is the apostle's instruction to Timothy concerning his ministry, personal conduct, and responsibilities among believers. Paul does not stop to question whether Timothy's physical difficulties were caused by insufficient faith. He acknowledges the existence of recurring infirmities and recommends a particular remedy. The expression “thine often infirmities” shows that Timothy experienced repeated bodily difficulties rather than a single imaginary complaint. Notice also the language “a little wine” and “for thy stomach's sake.” The recommendation was limited and purposeful. It was not a blanket endorsement of recreational drinking, nor was it permission to abandon self-

control. The Holy Ghost recorded a medicinal instruction within an inspired pastoral epistle, and no amount of religious enthusiasm can erase it.

Some people use this verse to defend drinking for pleasure, while others practically apologize for its existence because it interferes with their belief that every medicinal use of alcohol must be sinful. Both approaches mishandle the passage. Paul did not instruct Timothy to visit the nearest tavern and develop an appetite for intoxicating entertainment. Neither did he instruct him to refuse a practical remedy until his physical suffering became sufficiently impressive to demonstrate spirituality. He told him to use a little wine for his stomach and recurring infirmities. The Bible does not provide a complete medical explanation of Timothy's condition or identify the exact preparation of the wine. Therefore, nobody should pretend to know details God did not reveal. The relevant principle is that legitimate bodily treatment has a recognized place within Christian life. The fact that a substance may be misused does not establish that every proper use is wrong. A man who cannot distinguish treatment from indulgence needs more than a louder sermon. He needs to read the verse without adding his own words.

Timothy's case also reveals the difference between spiritual faithfulness and physical condition. Here was a minister entrusted with serious responsibilities, instructed by the apostle Paul, and commended for his faithful service. Yet he experienced recurring bodily infirmities. His physical weakness did not automatically establish spiritual weakness. Paul himself experienced affliction, and Second Corinthians 12:9 records the Lord's answer concerning his thorn in the flesh: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” That passage does not establish that every sickness must remain untreated, but it certainly destroys the notion that faithful believers are guaranteed freedom from bodily difficulties. The Christian lives in a mortal body awaiting future redemption, and bodily weakness remains part of present experience. Romans 8:23 speaks of believers waiting for “the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” Until then, wisdom and responsible care remain appropriate. **The man who refuses necessary treatment merely to prove that he possesses faith may be demonstrating stubbornness rather than spirituality.**

2. The Good Samaritan and the Beloved Physician

Luke 10:33–34 records the conduct of the Samaritan who encountered a wounded traveler abandoned by the roadside. The Samaritan “had compassion on him,” and then “went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine.” He placed the injured man upon his own beast, transported him to an inn, and arranged further care. The immediate purpose of Christ's account was to expose the difference between empty religious profession and genuine neighbourly mercy. The Samaritan did not merely express

sympathy while leaving the injured man to suffer. He took practical action. Notice that the treatment included ordinary remedies available in that setting. The Lord Jesus Christ did not present the use of those remedies as evidence of unbelief. Instead, the Samaritan's conduct became an illustration of compassion. It would be a strange interpretation indeed to condemn the very practical assistance Christ used to demonstrate genuine love for one's neighbour.

Colossians 4:14 provides another important detail: “Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.” Luke was associated with Paul and his ministry, and the apostle identifies him as a physician without treating the occupation as inherently ungodly. That does not mean every physician is correct, every treatment is beneficial, or every modern medical practice should be accepted without examination. It simply means that Scripture does not establish an absolute opposition between faith and medical care. Christians should exercise discernment concerning diagnoses, treatments, possible dangers, and the qualifications of those providing care. They should also refuse the foolish idea that professional medical assistance automatically competes with God's power. The Creator who supplied human beings with intelligence has not forbidden them to exercise that intelligence in caring for the sick. A Christian can pray earnestly while receiving appropriate treatment. The two activities are not enemies competing for ownership of the hospital room.

Consider the inconsistency of somebody who accepts ordinary medical assistance for a broken arm but condemns another believer for receiving treatment involving the mind, nervous system, or severe pain. Apparently, a bone may require medical attention, but the moment the problem involves depression, panic, disabling pain, or another condition affecting the brain, the patient is expected to solve everything by being more spiritual. That is not a distinction established by Scripture. Human beings possess bodies that can suffer many kinds of illness, and appropriate medical treatment may be necessary. The Bible does not authorize us to diagnose every troubling symptom as rebellion, demonic activity, or insufficient prayer. Nor should legitimate diagnoses become automatic excuses for every sinful decision. Both errors must be rejected. James 5:16 instructs believers to pray for one another, while the account of the Samaritan demonstrates practical compassion. **There is no contradiction between asking God to help the suffering and using the means available to relieve that suffering responsibly.**

3. Physical Dependence Is Not the Same Thing as Addiction

One of the most serious mistakes Christians make when discussing prescription drugs is treating physical dependence and addiction as though they were interchangeable. They are not. Physical dependence occurs when the body adapts to repeated exposure to a

substance, so that reducing or discontinuing it may produce withdrawal symptoms. That can happen during appropriate medical treatment without deception, intoxication-seeking, or sinful misuse. Addiction involves a destructive pattern of compulsive use, impaired control, and continued pursuit of a substance despite serious harm. A patient who requires a carefully managed medication and experiences withdrawal when it is reduced should not automatically be accused of lacking spiritual character. The body can develop physiological adaptations without the person deliberately surrendering moral responsibility. Christians ought to possess enough common sense to recognize the distinction. **A body that has adapted to medicine is not automatically a soul that has surrendered to sin.** Confusing those conditions can burden the innocent while doing very little to help those genuinely struggling with addiction.

First Corinthians 6:12 declares, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” This is an essential principle concerning Christian conduct, but the surrounding chapter concerns the believer's freedom, bodily responsibilities, and obligation to glorify God. Paul is not supplying a modern medical definition of drug dependence. Applying the verse properly requires distinguishing a destructive appetite from a legitimate medical necessity. A person who takes prescribed medication according to medical direction may be exercising responsibility rather than allowing the medication to become a sinful master. Another person may obtain the same substance dishonestly, take excessive quantities for intoxication, conceal the behavior, and neglect important responsibilities. The outward resemblance of the substances does not erase the difference in conduct. A bottle cannot tell the entire moral story by itself. Purpose, circumstances, honesty, medical necessity, and behavior must all be considered before rendering judgment.

There is also a danger in using the language of addiction to excuse conduct that deserves repentance. Some people deliberately misuse drugs, deceive physicians, obtain prescriptions under false pretenses, or continue dangerous behavior while denying that anything is wrong. Such actions cannot be justified merely by pointing to the reality of addiction as a medical condition. Ephesians 4:25 commands believers to put away lying, while Galatians 6:7 warns that a man reaps what he sows. Yet the person caught in destructive drug use needs more than condemnation. Addiction may involve powerful bodily and behavioral changes that require structured treatment, medical supervision, and sustained assistance. Galatians 6:1 commands restoration in a spirit of meekness. The Christian response should therefore combine truth concerning personal responsibility with compassion concerning genuine suffering. Neither declaring every dependent patient a sinner nor declaring every harmful choice involuntary satisfies the requirements of biblical

judgment. Wisdom refuses to confuse circumstances merely because they share the same medication.

4. Painkillers, Sedatives, and the Danger of Turning Relief Into Recklessness

Pain is real, and the Bible never commands believers to pretend otherwise. Job suffered grievously, Paul experienced bodily affliction, and Timothy had recurring infirmities. A person recovering from surgery, enduring a serious injury, receiving cancer treatment, or managing severe illness may require medication that carries significant risks alongside legitimate benefits. Opioid pain medications, for example, can provide important relief in appropriate circumstances while also presenting dangers involving sedation, dependence, misuse, and overdose. The existence of those dangers does not automatically make every prescribed use sinful. Nor does legitimate medical need guarantee that every treatment decision is wise. The Christian should approach such medication with prayer, honesty, informed medical guidance, and a willingness to discuss concerns about effectiveness and safety. Proverbs 4:20–22 emphasizes attending to wise instruction and speaks of words that are "life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh." The passage is not a promise that righteous people will never require pain relief. It teaches the importance of receiving wisdom rather than surrendering to foolishness.

Sedatives and sleeping medications raise their own concerns. Some are prescribed for legitimate medical conditions, and their appropriate use may be part of responsible care. But they can also impair alertness, coordination, and judgment, particularly when misused or combined with other substances. Mixing certain sedatives with alcohol or opioids can dangerously suppress breathing. A person taking medication that causes impairment should not operate a vehicle or dangerous equipment merely because the substance was legally prescribed. Romans 13:10 declares, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour." That principle requires consideration of everyone who might suffer from reckless decisions. The man who refuses to drive after drinking but climbs behind the wheel while seriously impaired by medication has not discovered a clever exception. He has merely changed the source of the danger. A prescription label is an instruction to use medicine responsibly, not an official pardon for whatever happens afterward.

Another danger appears when a patient begins changing doses without medical direction, taking medication for an intoxicating effect, combining it with substances that were never intended to be used together, or seeking additional prescriptions through deception. At that point, the original medical purpose may be giving way to deliberate misuse. Ephesians 4:28 commands honest conduct, and Colossians 3:9 declares, "Lie not one to another." The believer cannot separate dishonesty surrounding medication from the moral condition of his Christian walk. Yet a person who notices increasing dependence or diminished

benefit should not secretly alter treatment or abruptly discontinue medication in an attempt to prove self-control. Those concerns belong in an honest conversation with a qualified medical professional. Proper treatment sometimes requires adjustments, alternatives, or supervised reduction. **Medicine ought to be administered according to legitimate need, not according to how much pleasure someone can squeeze out of the prescription.** Relief is a valid medical objective; intoxication pursued through abuse is another matter entirely.

5. The Troubled Mind Needs Truth, and Sometimes It Needs Treatment

There is a dangerous form of religious arrogance that treats every difficulty involving the mind as though it must be caused by inadequate Bible reading. A person reports severe depression, overwhelming anxiety, persistent insomnia, or another serious condition, and somebody immediately announces that medication is unnecessary because the individual should simply trust God. Trusting God is essential, but Scripture never authorizes Christians to diagnose every illness through a convenient religious accusation. Second Timothy 1:7 declares, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Paul is encouraging Timothy to faithful service rather than cowardice in the face of suffering and opposition. The verse does not establish that faithful believers are immune to psychiatric illness or that receiving treatment demonstrates unbelief. It is a command to courage and faithful conduct, not an instruction to abandon necessary medical care. The Bible should be preached accurately rather than turned into a club for striking people who are already suffering.

At the same time, modern terminology must not become an excuse for removing moral responsibility from every human decision. Scripture identifies fear, unbelief, bitterness, drunkenness, dishonesty, and other sins that believers must confront. Some people suffer conditions requiring medical attention, while others knowingly cultivate destructive habits, and those circumstances may overlap. Appropriate psychiatric treatment, including medication when clinically indicated, should not automatically be equated with recreational intoxication. Many psychiatric medications are prescribed to treat symptoms or help restore functioning rather than produce a high. Yet no medication can replace repentance where repentance is required, and no diagnosis grants permission to mistreat others. The Christian needs both biblical discernment and responsible care. **A physician should not be expected to perform the work of the Holy Ghost, and a preacher should not pretend that he can diagnose every medical condition by raising his voice.** Both have serious responsibilities, and neither should claim authority that properly belongs elsewhere.

The danger of self-medication deserves particular attention because the person may begin using alcohol, borrowed prescriptions, recreational drugs, or excessive quantities of medication to escape distress. What began as an attempt to obtain relief can develop into another problem requiring treatment. Proverbs 14:12 declares, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” The individual may believe that temporary chemical relief is solving his difficulties when it is actually introducing additional risks. Nevertheless, those suffering severe emotional or psychiatric symptoms should not be ashamed to seek legitimate professional assistance. Prayer, biblical counsel, Christian fellowship, and appropriate treatment are not inherently competing responses. Some circumstances require urgent medical intervention, especially when a person is in danger of harming himself or others. The believer should neither glorify chemical escape nor condemn necessary care. God has not instructed His children to manufacture additional suffering merely to establish that they are serious about trusting Him.

6. When the Medicine Cabinet Becomes a Hiding Place for Sin

Proverbs 4:23 commands, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” In its original setting, Proverbs provides wisdom instruction associated with the responsibilities of Israel's households, but its moral principles expose the importance of guarding the inner life. The heart must not be surrendered to whatever desire happens to demand attention. When prescription drugs become objects of dishonesty, secret indulgence, or deliberate intoxication, the problem extends beyond the chemical contents of the medicine. It involves the decisions surrounding their use. A person may begin concealing quantities, taking another family member's medication, visiting multiple prescribers without honest disclosure, or purchasing supposedly pharmaceutical substances from unauthorized sources. Those behaviors introduce serious dangers, including counterfeit products and unpredictable potency. A medicine cabinet is not a private pharmacy where every family member may select whatever substance seems appealing. **The label on the bottle may identify the medicine, but it cannot make dishonesty righteous.** God expects truthfulness even when the subject is something prescribed by a physician.

James 1:5 declares, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” James was writing concerning trials, faith, patience, and the believer's need for divine wisdom. The passage does not promise that prayer will automatically supply specialized medical knowledge without study or consultation. It does establish that Christians should seek wisdom rather than follow impulsive desires. A person considering a potentially risky medication should ask

appropriate questions concerning its intended purpose, expected benefits, side effects, interactions, and safe use. Honest communication with the prescriber matters. So does keeping medication secure, avoiding unauthorized sharing, and following proper instructions for storage and disposal. These are ordinary expressions of responsible stewardship. The Christian who carefully examines every automobile repair estimate but swallows unknown pills supplied by an acquaintance has demonstrated a rather strange method of decision-making. Wisdom is not merely something to admire during Bible study. It ought to govern ordinary decisions involving the body.

Families also have responsibilities when substance misuse begins threatening the household. A spouse should not be expected to obtain drugs dishonestly, conceal dangerous behavior, or finance another person's addiction. Parents should take appropriate precautions to prevent children from accessing medications that could harm them. Yet necessary medicine should not be withheld from a patient as punishment, and family members should not secretly change prescribed treatment because they believe they know better than qualified professionals. Where misuse is suspected, honest discussion and appropriate medical assessment are needed. Galatians 6:2 commands believers to bear one another's burdens, while Galatians 6:5 reminds readers that every man must bear his own burden. These instructions address complementary responsibilities: helping others without denying personal accountability. Compassion does not require participation in wrongdoing, and accountability does not require cruelty. A Christian household should never become a place where necessary treatment is condemned while dangerous misuse is quietly protected. The difference between loving help and destructive enabling may require difficult decisions, but Scripture never commands us to confuse the two.

7. Real Deliverance Requires Wisdom, Not Reckless Decisions

Some people struggling with alcohol or medication dependence become so convicted about their condition that they decide to stop everything immediately. Their desire for change may be sincere, but sincerity does not eliminate medical danger. Abrupt withdrawal from alcohol or certain sedatives, including benzodiazepines, can produce seizures, severe confusion, and other life-threatening complications. Other medications may produce serious withdrawal effects or a return of the illness being treated when stopped suddenly. Opioid withdrawal can also cause severe suffering and complications, even though its medical risks differ from those of alcohol and sedative withdrawal. Therefore, individuals who may be physically dependent should obtain qualified medical guidance before discontinuing treatment. There is nothing cowardly about pursuing a safe withdrawal plan. Proverbs 22:3 declares, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the

simple pass on, and are punished." Prudence does not disappear because somebody has experienced religious conviction. **Repentance should turn a man away from destruction, not persuade him to ignore the dangers of withdrawing without proper care.**

The Christian seeking recovery must also distinguish between forgiveness, treatment, and the rebuilding of trust. First John 1:9 declares that God is faithful and just to forgive believers who confess their sins. But confession does not automatically remove physical dependence, repair financial consequences, or restore confidence damaged through repeated dishonesty. Genuine repentance should produce honest conduct and a willingness to accept necessary accountability. Some individuals may need supervised treatment, carefully managed medication changes, structured addiction care, or continuing support from qualified professionals. The church can provide prayer, biblical instruction, practical assistance, and faithful fellowship without pretending that every medical responsibility belongs to the pastor. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore the fallen "in the spirit of meekness." That expression excludes both arrogant condemnation and sentimental permission to continue destructive conduct. The believer struggling with addiction needs truth strong enough to confront sin and charity patient enough to help him pursue lasting change.

Finally, the doctrine of salvation must remain separate from the question of successful treatment. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." A man does not become saved by stopping medication, conquering addiction, or establishing a spotless medical history. Salvation rests upon Jesus Christ and His finished work, received through faith. Neither does every relapse automatically prove that an individual was never genuinely converted. Nevertheless, the grace of God teaches saved people to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Titus 2:11–12 establishes that obligation plainly. Eternal security must never become permission to cultivate destructive habits. A believer should pursue obedience while recognizing that bodily treatment and spiritual sanctification are not identical processes. The Lord who saves the soul also commands responsible conduct in the body. Genuine Christian maturity is not demonstrated by boasting that no assistance is necessary. It is demonstrated by submitting to truth and exercising wisdom wherever responsibility requires it.

Conclusion — Let Medicine Serve Its Purpose Without Becoming Your Master

The Bible does not condemn every substance that affects the body, and it does not require Christians to reject legitimate medical care. Paul recognized Timothy's recurring infirmities and recommended a specific remedy. The Samaritan provided practical assistance to an injured traveler, and Luke was identified as a beloved physician. Those passages deserve

honest attention. Necessary pain treatment, anesthesia, psychiatric medication, and other appropriate interventions must not be casually equated with recreational intoxication. At the same time, Scripture does not authorize dishonesty, deliberate drug abuse, dangerous self-medication, or the cultivation of destructive appetites. First Corinthians 6:12 remains a searching principle: “I will not be brought under the power of any.” The believer must distinguish proper treatment from misuse, physical dependence from addiction, and medical necessity from conduct that has become dishonest or destructive. **The problem is not that medicine exists. The problem begins when the purpose of treatment is abandoned and the pursuit of intoxication takes its place.**

There is also a responsibility resting upon Christians who speak to those struggling with illness or dependence. Do not condemn the suffering patient merely because the treatment involves medication that someone else might abuse. Do not accuse a person of unbelief because surgery requires anesthesia, severe pain requires treatment, or a psychiatric condition warrants professional care. But do not flatter the individual who deliberately misuses drugs and then hides behind the medical needs of others. Scripture commands truth, wisdom, charity, and responsibility. The person struggling with addiction needs honest counsel and appropriate assistance, not another collection of excuses. Those dependent upon alcohol or certain medications may require medically supervised withdrawal rather than an abrupt and dangerous attempt to stop. And family members deserve guidance that protects necessary treatment without enabling harmful conduct. The church ought to possess enough biblical understanding to recognize these distinctions. **Faith is not strengthened by condemning the medicine that helps the sick, and holiness is not advanced by excusing the misuse that destroys lives.**

The Christian's ultimate confidence belongs in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. The gospel is not a prescription for earthly comfort, and salvation is not a reward for maintaining perfect health. But the redeemed believer belongs to the Lord and is commanded to glorify Him in body and spirit. First Corinthians 6:19–20 reminds Christians that they are bought with a price, while James 1:5 directs the believer who lacks wisdom to seek it from God. Those truths belong together. Seek wisdom when treatment is necessary. Exercise honesty when medication is prescribed. Accept legitimate care without shame, recognize dangerous dependence without denial, and refuse to turn a medical remedy into an excuse for deliberate intoxication. The Lord never commanded His children to prove their spirituality by suffering needlessly, and He never gave them permission to surrender themselves to an appetite simply because it arrived in a prescription bottle. **Medicine ought to help a man fulfill his responsibilities, not become the reason he abandons them. Let the remedy**

serve the patient, let wisdom govern its use, and never allow the medicine intended to relieve suffering to become a master that produces more of it.

8 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — The Chains Nobody Sees: Addiction, Relapse, and the Battle for Deliverance

Key Passage: Romans 6:12–14 — "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."

There is a considerable difference between standing behind a pulpit and condemning drunkenness and sitting beside a man who has been fighting the same bottle for twenty years. From a distance, the answer appears wonderfully simple. Tell him to quit drinking, straighten up, get right with God, and stop making excuses. There is biblical truth in confronting sin and demanding personal responsibility. But the fellow who believes addiction can always be conquered by delivering one sufficiently loud rebuke has probably never watched a trembling man beg God for freedom while his body demands another drink. Romans 6:12 declares, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." Notice that Paul addresses believers who have already been brought into a new relationship with Jesus Christ. They are commanded not to allow sin to reign. The command is real, the responsibility is real, and the struggle can be terribly real. A man may know perfectly well that the bottle is destroying him and still find himself reaching for it. That does not make his drinking righteous, but it ought to make the self-righteous spectator considerably less interested in displaying his own superiority.

There are stories from old rescue missions that should silence the careless fellow who believes every drinking problem is merely an opportunity for a clever religious slogan. Men came through those doors who had once held respectable employment, maintained households, and enjoyed ordinary lives. Some had been businessmen, skilled workers, or men with families who had gradually lost their possessions, reputations, and health through drinking. Others began life in households where alcohol was already a controlling influence before they were old enough to understand its danger. They heard the gospel, some professed faith in Jesus Christ, and a number demonstrated remarkable changes in their conduct. Yet not every testimony ended with uninterrupted sobriety. Some returned to drinking after months or years of apparent victory. Others struggled repeatedly while

expressing genuine sorrow over their failures. The bottle does not become harmless because a man hates it, and the chains do not become imaginary because somebody else cannot see them. There are men who have escaped prison walls only to discover that the cruelest prison they ever occupied was the one they carried inside their own appetites.

This subject must be handled with enough biblical courage to condemn drunkenness and enough Christian charity to recognize the suffering of those struggling to escape it. Addiction can involve powerful cravings, physical dependence, impaired control, repeated relapse, and serious medical complications. Sinful choices may be involved without every physical symptom becoming a separate act of rebellion against God. Likewise, the existence of addiction does not cancel responsibility for deliberate deception, abuse, theft, or other wrongdoing. Scripture commands repentance, confession, self-control, restoration, and faithful fellowship. It also distinguishes salvation by grace from the believer's daily sanctification. A Christian struggling with alcohol must not automatically be pronounced lost every time he falls, nor should eternal security become an excuse to remain willingly enslaved. The grace of God is neither a license for drunkenness nor a promise that every struggle disappears overnight. **The man in bondage needs more than somebody telling him the chains are sinful. He needs the truth, the help, and the determination necessary to break free and remain free.**

1. Sin Shall Not Have Dominion: The Master That Must Be Refused

Romans 6:12–14 belongs to Paul's explanation of the believer's identification with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. Earlier in the chapter, Paul establishes that believers are baptized into Christ's death and are to walk in newness of life. Romans 6:6 declares, “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” The apostle is not teaching that the Christian's mortal body has become incapable of temptation. If that were the case, the command against allowing sin to reign would be unnecessary. Rather, the believer has received a new standing in Christ and must no longer surrender himself to the former master. That distinction matters when examining addiction. The saved man is not commanded to pretend that temptation has disappeared. He is commanded to refuse its authority. Grace does not require him to deny the existence of the battle. Grace establishes why the battle must be fought and why surrender is not the proper conclusion.

Notice Paul's language in Romans 6:12: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body.” Reigning describes authority. A king issues commands, expects obedience, and exercises power over his subjects. Now consider the man whose drinking habit begins determining where he goes, whom he associates with, how he spends his money, and what responsibilities he neglects. He may claim to be making independent decisions while

steadily arranging his life around the next drink. He might even become angry when someone suggests that alcohol has gained control over him. But if a substance determines his schedule, governs his spending, and continually overrides his better judgment, there is a serious question concerning who is actually exercising authority. A man may insist that he owns the bottle because he purchased it. That is an interesting argument from somebody who cannot seem to stop obeying it. **When an appetite begins giving orders and the individual keeps obeying, the servant has become the master, regardless of whose name appears on the receipt.**

Romans 6:13 continues, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead." The word "yield" is important because it places responsibility upon the believer concerning how his body is used. Yet the command must not be confused with a claim that overcoming physical dependence requires no medical assistance. Alcohol addiction can involve bodily adaptations that make withdrawal dangerous, and some people require supervised treatment. The Christian who seeks such care is not denying the authority of Scripture. He is exercising judgment concerning a real bodily condition. But the need for treatment does not establish that the individual should continue making provision for destructive conduct. Romans 6:14 declares, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." That is not a promise that every addicted believer will experience immediate freedom without struggle. It is a declaration that grace establishes a new relationship to sin, and the redeemed man must not voluntarily return to serving what Christ has called him to forsake.

2. The Rescue Mission Knows What the Respectable World Tries to Forget

At one rescue mission, a young man barely out of his teenage years had already become involved in destructive drinking. He was confronted about the alcohol he was carrying and urged to consider what his life would become if he continued down the same road as older men who had lost so much. Later, he entered the meeting and surrendered the bottle he had been carrying. That scene contained more truth than a hundred polished advertisements for alcoholic beverages. Here was a young man confronting the possibility that the substance he considered part of ordinary life might eventually destroy him. The surrender of one bottle did not automatically guarantee lifelong sobriety, and nobody should manufacture an ending the account does not establish. But it represented an important confrontation with reality. A man cannot begin addressing a destructive habit while insisting that the habit is harmless. The first honest step often occurs when he stops defending what is ruining him.

Another account concerns a man who had spent years in alcoholism before becoming involved in the work of a rescue mission. Following his profession of faith, he experienced a substantial period of sobriety and became a useful witness among other struggling men. His changed conduct carried weight because the people around him knew what his previous life had been. Then former drinking companions returned, and during a hunting trip he relapsed. The consequences were devastating. Eventually, he could be found sitting with a Bible in one hand and a bottle in the other, conscious of the contradiction between the truth he believed and the habit that had regained its hold upon him. There is no comedy in that picture. It shows the terrible division that can develop between a man's professed convictions and his conduct. He knew the Scriptures. He understood the testimony he had damaged. Yet knowledge alone had not protected him from returning to the old appetite. **The most painful chains are sometimes the ones a man recognizes as chains while still struggling to escape them.**

A third account concerns a man who experienced years of sobriety after professing faith in Christ, only to relapse through renewed association with former drinking companions. His health had already suffered severely, and another period of heavy drinking brought him into a hospital where his condition became critical. Those who spoke with him found a man overwhelmed by sorrow, and his life ended under circumstances that should make every careless defender of drinking examine the consequences. Such accounts must not be used to pronounce infallible judgments concerning another person's eternal destination. God knows the heart, and salvation cannot be determined simply by measuring the severity of an addiction. But neither should the suffering be dismissed. The warning of Proverbs 23:35 remains dreadful: “when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.” The drunkard may understand that the bottle has injured him and still return to it. A person who has never experienced that struggle should thank God for his freedom rather than boast as though he personally manufactured it.

3. The Flesh Does Not Become Harmless Because the Soul Has Been Saved

Romans 7:18 declares, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.” Paul is addressing the relationship between God's law, sin, the flesh, and the inability of human effort to produce righteousness. The passage must not be reduced to a description of alcoholism, because its doctrinal purpose is considerably broader. Nevertheless, the conflict described provides important instruction concerning the believer's struggle against sinful desires. The flesh has not become righteous simply because the individual has trusted Jesus Christ. Salvation brings a new spiritual standing and life in Christ, but the believer continues living in a mortal body where temptation remains possible. That is why

the New Testament repeatedly commands Christians to walk in the Spirit, mortify sinful practices, and refuse the desires of the flesh. If conversion automatically removed every wrong desire, most of those commandments would be unnecessary.

Romans 7:19 continues, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” The verse exposes the failure of human resolve when confronted with the power of sin. It should not be twisted into an excuse that makes continued disobedience inevitable or acceptable. Paul is explaining a spiritual problem, not celebrating defeat as a normal Christian achievement. But consider the man struggling with addiction who sincerely desires to stop drinking. He may hate what alcohol has done to his family, recognize the dishonor his conduct brings upon his testimony, and genuinely intend never to drink again. Then temptation arrives, perhaps accompanied by cravings, familiar associations, or physical discomfort, and another failure follows. His sincere desire did not automatically produce victory. That does not mean repentance was necessarily fraudulent, but it does demonstrate that determination without wise action may be insufficient. **A man can be thoroughly disgusted with his chains and still need help learning how to live without them.**

Romans 7:24 asks, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” The question is not answered by announcing that human willpower is sufficient if the individual simply becomes angry enough at himself. Verse 25 begins, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The argument then moves into Romans 8, where the believer's position in Christ and the operation of the Spirit receive further explanation. Romans 8:1 declares, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,” and Romans 8:13 commands believers through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the body. The distinction is essential. Freedom from condemnation does not mean freedom to indulge the flesh. Neither does the continuing presence of temptation prove that Christ has abandoned the believer. The Christian must learn to depend upon the Lord while refusing the habits that encourage disobedience. **Grace does not make the battle imaginary. It gives the redeemed man a reason to stop surrendering the field.**

4. Such Were Some of You: Salvation Is Not Purchased With Sobriety

First Corinthians 6:9–10 contains a severe warning concerning unrighteousness and the inheritance of the kingdom of God. Among the sins identified are fornication, idolatry, adultery, theft, covetousness, drunkenness, and other conduct contrary to righteousness. Paul writes that such persons “shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” That statement must not be concealed merely because it presents a difficulty for somebody struggling with alcohol. Drunkenness is sin, and Scripture does not excuse it as an innocent personality characteristic. But the passage must be read alongside verse 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." Paul is addressing people whose former conduct had been marked by serious wickedness but whose standing before God had been changed through Jesus Christ. Their salvation rested upon the Saviour, not upon their ability to maintain a spotless record afterward.

There are two dangerous errors that must be rejected. The first declares that a man must successfully defeat alcoholism before he can receive salvation. That contradicts Ephesians 2:8–9, which establishes salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. The sinner does not clean himself up sufficiently to qualify for the blood of Christ. He comes as a sinner needing the Saviour. The second error declares that because salvation is eternal, drunkenness no longer matters. That contradicts the explicit warnings of First Corinthians 6 and the many New Testament commandments concerning Christian conduct. A profession of faith must never become an excuse to embrace a life characterized by unrepentant wickedness. Yet neither should every relapse be treated as conclusive proof that the individual was never saved. God knows who belongs to Him. The Christian may examine conduct, administer biblical correction, and warn against sin without pretending to possess the Lord's perfect knowledge of another person's heart.

The distinction between salvation, sanctification, and accountability is indispensable. John 10:28 records Christ's promise concerning His sheep: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Eternal life is not a temporary possession maintained by perfect human performance. Nevertheless, First Corinthians 3:11–15 teaches that the believer's works will be examined, and verse 15 distinguishes the loss of reward from the believer's salvation. The Judgment Seat of Christ is a serious matter, not a religious decoration. The Christian who persists in drunkenness damages his testimony, invites painful consequences, and exposes himself to divine chastening and accountability. But the man who struggles, repents, and seeks restoration should not be driven to despair by somebody announcing that every failure cancels the promise of Christ. **Salvation is not earned by putting down the bottle, and it is not maintained by pretending the bottle can no longer tempt you. It rests upon Jesus Christ, who commands the saved man to walk in obedience.**

5. Relapse Is Serious, but It Is Not a Command to Surrender

A relapse can bring terrible consequences because it may destroy confidence that took months or years to rebuild. A wife who has watched her husband return to drinking after a period of sobriety may feel that every promise has become uncertain again. Children may become frightened, employers may question reliability, and church members may struggle to know how to respond. Those consequences are real, and the individual who relapses

must not dismiss them merely because recovery is difficult. Galatians 6:7 declares, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Yet a relapse should not automatically become a declaration that further effort is useless. Proverbs 24:16 declares, “For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief.” The proverb concerns the distinction between the righteous and the wicked amid adversity, not a numerical promise concerning addiction recovery. Still, the wisdom of refusing permanent surrender remains worth considering.

Former companions can present a particular danger because familiar relationships may revive patterns that seemed to have been abandoned. A man may remain sober for years and then return to an environment where the bottle was once central to his fellowship. He remembers the laughter, the company, and the apparent enjoyment while conveniently forgetting the misery that followed. First Corinthians 15:33 declares, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” In its immediate setting, Paul is confronting corrupt teaching concerning the resurrection, but the principle demonstrates how harmful influence can undermine conduct. The Christian seeking sobriety should examine the people, places, and habits that repeatedly encourage drinking. There is no biblical requirement to maintain close fellowship with companions who continually pressure someone toward destructive behavior. **A man who has escaped a burning house does not prove his courage by moving back into the same bedroom and waiting for the smoke to return.**

Physical dependence makes the situation still more serious. A person who has been drinking heavily for a prolonged period may experience dangerous withdrawal when alcohol is suddenly discontinued. Severe withdrawal can produce seizures, confusion, and life-threatening complications. Some individuals require supervised medical detoxification, and nobody should be instructed to lock himself in a room, refuse necessary care, or risk death to demonstrate the sincerity of repentance. That would be recklessness disguised as spirituality. Proverbs 22:3 declares, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” Seeking qualified medical assistance is an expression of prudence when serious bodily danger exists. The Christian can confess sin, seek the Lord, and obtain appropriate treatment without contradiction. The Creator has not commanded His people to abandon common sense when their health is threatened. A safe path toward sobriety may require medical evaluation, structured treatment, and continuing support. Repentance should lead a person away from destruction, not encourage him to create another form of it.

6. Confess Your Faults: The Church Must Help Carry the Burden

James 5:16 declares, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” The surrounding passage addresses sickness, prayer, spiritual responsibility, and the believer's relationship with others. It does not establish that every addiction will disappear immediately following a public confession, nor does it require a struggling person to disclose every private detail before an entire congregation. But it certainly demonstrates that Christians should not imagine they are required to face every burden in isolation. A believer trapped in destructive drinking may need to acknowledge the problem honestly to trustworthy individuals who can provide prayer, accountability, and practical assistance. Concealment often allows wrongdoing to continue without correction. Proverbs 28:13 declares, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Genuine confession is not a theatrical performance. It is the abandonment of deception before God and the acceptance of responsibility where wrongdoing has occurred.

There is an important difference between holding someone accountable and treating him as a permanent disgrace. A church should not encourage drunkenness, conceal dangerous conduct, or automatically restore an unqualified individual to positions requiring trust. First Timothy 3 establishes sobriety among the qualifications for church leadership, and those standards must be respected. But the same congregation should not abandon a repentant believer merely because his struggle has become inconvenient. Galatians 6:2 declares, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” That command requires more than shaking a man's hand after a service and telling him to try harder. It may involve helping him obtain treatment, providing transportation, encouraging faithful attendance, and maintaining appropriate accountability. The church cannot guarantee that every person will accept help or remain sober, but it can refuse to become another place where struggling individuals are discarded without concern. **A congregation that can organize a banquet ought to possess enough Christian charity to help a man who is fighting for his life.**

Families must also understand the difference between assistance and enabling. A wife cannot repent on behalf of her husband, parents cannot manufacture sobriety in an adult child, and children must not be made responsible for controlling a parent's drinking. Financial assistance should not become a reliable method of purchasing additional alcohol. Forgiveness does not require concealing violence, accepting threats, or continually restoring trust without evidence of changed conduct. Romans 12:18 declares, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Peace cannot always be maintained through the actions of one person alone. Where abuse or immediate danger exists, protecting vulnerable family members and seeking lawful assistance are

necessary responsibilities. Where genuine repentance appears, restoration may be pursued with wisdom and appropriate boundaries. A struggling person needs support, but support must not become permission for further destruction. The Christian family should neither abandon the repentant nor sacrifice the innocent to preserve the appearance of harmony.

7. Stand Fast in Liberty: Do Not Turn the Ditch Into Your Address

Galatians 5:1 declares, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” In its original doctrinal setting, Paul is confronting the danger of returning to legal bondage through the false teaching that believers must submit to circumcision and law-keeping for justification. The verse must not be removed from that setting and presented as though Paul were discussing alcoholism specifically. Nevertheless, the believer's liberty in Christ carries moral responsibilities elsewhere explained throughout the New Testament. Romans 6 commands Christians not to serve sin, while Galatians 5:13 warns against using liberty as an occasion to the flesh. A man who has received eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ should not celebrate the return of an appetite that is destroying him. Nor should he imagine that his salvation depends upon maintaining an uninterrupted record of sobriety. The law cannot save him, his own determination cannot redeem him, and the bottle cannot provide the peace that belongs to the Lord.

Psalm 40:1–3 presents another wonderful testimony of deliverance. David declares, “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.” He continues by describing the Lord bringing him out of “an horrible pit, out of the miry clay” and establishing his feet upon a rock. The psalm concerns David's experience of divine deliverance and must not be converted into a guarantee that every believer's addiction will disappear instantly after one prayer. But its language provides a powerful picture of what it means to be rescued from a condition in which human strength is insufficient. Notice that David did not boast of constructing his own foundation beneath the mire. He praised the Lord who established his steps. The man seeking sobriety should likewise recognize that victory requires more than confidence in his own abilities. Prayer, obedience, honest accountability, and appropriate assistance belong together. **When God brings a man out of the pit, the proper response is not to build a comfortable chair beside the mud and admire how familiar everything looks.**

The practical path forward requires honest decisions repeated through ordinary life. The person struggling with alcohol must recognize the circumstances that encourage drinking, refuse companions who pressure him toward relapse, accept accountability, and pursue appropriate treatment. He must be willing to repair what can be repaired, acknowledge

consequences that cannot be reversed, and demonstrate repentance through consistent conduct. Colossians 3:5 commands believers to mortify sinful practices, while Ephesians 4:22–24 speaks of putting off the old man and putting on the new. Those instructions concern the believer's walk, not a second attempt to purchase salvation through works. A Christian may experience discouragement, temptation, and serious setbacks without receiving permission to abandon the struggle. Nor should he confuse one successful week with the completion of every responsibility. Sobriety must be guarded through continuing wisdom and obedience. The man who falls into a ditch needs help getting out, but falling back into the ditch is never a reason to call the ditch home.

Conclusion — The Chains Can Be Real Without Becoming Your Identity

There are men and women who know the misery of addiction more intimately than they ever wanted to know it. They understand the humiliation of another broken promise, the fear of losing their families, the bodily demands of dependence, and the sorrow of awakening after a relapse they sincerely intended to avoid. Some have experienced remarkable periods of sobriety only to discover that old temptations remain dangerous. Others have struggled for years while friends, relatives, and fellow Christians have gradually lost confidence in their promises. The Bible does not command us to pretend those failures are harmless. Drunkenness is sin, deception must be confronted, and responsibility cannot be abandoned. But neither does Scripture authorize the comfortable spectator to pronounce every struggling believer eternally lost or beyond restoration. First Corinthians 6:11 declares, “And such were some of you.” The grace of God is powerful enough to save sinners whose previous lives were marked by terrible wickedness. The Christian must never make peace with sin, but he must also never forget the mercy of the Saviour.

There is a place for strong preaching against the bottle, and there is a place for sitting beside the man who is struggling to put it down. Those responsibilities are not enemies. The preacher who refuses to condemn drunkenness has abandoned biblical truth, while the Christian who condemns the drunkard without concern for his deliverance has forgotten the command to restore the fallen in meekness. The struggling individual needs to hear that he is responsible for his conduct, that repentance matters, and that continuing in destructive habits carries serious consequences. He also needs to understand that medical treatment may be necessary, that appropriate accountability is valuable, and that one relapse does not automatically establish that every previous expression of faith was fraudulent. Families deserve protection, churches must exercise discernment, and genuine restoration requires more than emotional promises. **Truth without compassion**

can leave a fallen man lying in the ditch. Compassion without truth can persuade him that the ditch is a perfectly acceptable place to remain. Biblical charity does neither.

The final answer is not found in the bottle, the promises of human determination, or the religious pride of somebody who has never experienced addiction. It is found in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is received by grace through faith, not earned by achieving sobriety. Yet the grace that saves also teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Romans 6:14 remains the great declaration: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." The Christian who has fallen should confess his wrongdoing, seek appropriate help, accept necessary accountability, and continue pursuing obedience rather than surrendering to despair. The believer helping him should speak plainly, pray faithfully, and remember that lasting recovery may involve a difficult struggle. The man holding a Bible in one hand and a bottle in the other needs more than another excuse for his contradiction. He needs to surrender the destructive habit and pursue the liberty Christ has given him. **The chains may be strong, the battle may be long, and the failures may be painful, but the bottle was never meant to occupy the throne of a life belonging to Jesus Christ. Falling into bondage is terrible. Making peace with bondage is worse. And the man who has fallen should never be told that getting up is no longer worth the fight.**

9 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — Your Liberty May Become Another Man's Bondage: The Testimony You Never Considered

Key Passage: Romans 14:13–21 — "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." (Romans 14:21)

There is something remarkable about a Christian who will spend three hours defending his right to have a drink but cannot spare three minutes considering what that drink might mean to somebody sitting across the table. He knows his liberty. He understands grace. He has memorized the marriage at Cana, located Paul's instruction to Timothy, and prepared a respectable argument explaining why nobody should question his personal decisions. But ask him about Romans 14:21, and suddenly the discussion becomes considerably less comfortable. The apostle Paul declares, "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." There is the

verse that puts another person's spiritual welfare directly between the Christian and his insistence upon exercising every possible liberty. The question is no longer merely whether the believer can defend a particular drink. The question is whether he loves his brother enough to leave it alone when exercising that liberty would cause genuine spiritual harm.

The damage caused by a careless example is not always visible to the person setting it. A Christian may possess enough self-control to consume an occasional alcoholic beverage without becoming intoxicated, neglecting his responsibilities, or developing an obvious dependence. That possibility must be acknowledged without pretending Scripture explicitly condemns every instance of alcohol consumption. But what happens when another believer, who has struggled for years to escape drunkenness, interprets that example as encouragement to begin drinking again? What happens when a young Christian concludes that his spiritual mentor has settled the entire question by keeping alcohol in the refrigerator? What happens when children hear their parents condemn drunkenness while repeatedly presenting drinking as an essential ingredient of adult enjoyment? These questions do not establish that every occasional drinker is responsible for everybody else's choices. They establish that personal conduct can influence other people, and the Bible commands believers to consider that influence. **The glass may be in your hand, but the consequences of your example may reach into somebody else's life.**

The apostle Paul addressed this issue long before modern Christians began arguing over restaurant menus, social gatherings, and what constitutes acceptable drinking. Romans 14 confronts matters involving conscience, personal convictions, and the spiritual welfare of believers whose understanding differs. First Corinthians 8 examines the danger of exercising knowledge in a manner that emboldens a weaker brother to violate his conscience. First Corinthians 10 commands believers to consider the glory of God and the profit of others. Philippians 2 instructs Christians to abandon selfish ambition and regard the interests of their brethren. These passages do not establish that every personal objection constitutes a genuine stumblingblock, and they must not become weapons for imposing man-made commandments upon the Church. Nevertheless, they destroy the notion that Christian liberty exists independently of Christian love. A man who insists that his conduct is nobody else's business has apparently overlooked several chapters explaining why another believer's welfare is precisely his business. Freedom in Christ is a glorious doctrine, but it was never intended to become a religious disguise for selfishness.

1. Judge This Rather: Stop Putting Obstacles in Your Brother's Way

Romans 14:13 declares, “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.” Notice the deliberate contrast. Paul forbids the kind of judgment that improperly condemns

brethren over disputable matters, but immediately commands another kind of judgment: the believer must examine whether his own conduct is creating an occasion for someone else to fall. The Christian who quotes only the first half of the verse has missed the force of the instruction. Paul is not abolishing discernment. He is redirecting it from condemning another man's conscience toward examining one's own responsibility. The immediate context concerns differences over food and the observing of days among believers, including those whose consciences remained influenced by earlier religious practices. This is direct New Testament instruction to the Church, not an Old Testament ceremonial commandment being transferred into a different dispensation. The principle concerns how redeemed people ought to treat one another under grace.

Romans 14:14 continues, “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” Paul recognizes a distinction between the objective nature of something permissible and the condition of a believer's conscience concerning it. His argument does not mean that fornication, drunkenness, idolatry, and other explicitly condemned sins become acceptable whenever somebody considers them harmless. The apostle is discussing matters that do not possess an inherent prohibition under the circumstances being considered. This distinction is essential when examining alcohol. Scripture condemns drunkenness, but it does not establish that every instance of consuming alcoholic wine is necessarily drunkenness. Nevertheless, even where a particular use is not expressly forbidden, the believer remains responsible for his conscience and the consequences of his example. A man may be correct that an act is lawful and still be wrong in the manner, occasion, or circumstances in which he practices it.

Then comes Romans 14:15: “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.” That last expression ought to make a Christian examine his priorities. Paul places the welfare of a brother purchased by Jesus Christ above the enjoyment of something the individual regards as permissible. The issue is not whether the stronger believer possesses superior knowledge. He may understand the doctrinal question perfectly. The issue is whether his knowledge is governed by charity. Imagine explaining to the Lord that preserving a personal drinking preference was more important than protecting a struggling brother from a foreseeable temptation. That would be an impressive argument to present before the One who gave His life for that brother. Paul does not command the Christian to surrender truth. He commands him to exercise truth in love. **A believer who can win the argument about liberty but loses sight of the brother for whom Christ died has forgotten what the argument was supposed to accomplish.**

2. A Stumblingblock Is More Than Somebody Disapproving of You

There is a necessary distinction between becoming a genuine stumblingblock and merely doing something another Christian dislikes. If every personal objection automatically established a biblical stumblingblock, the most demanding individual in the congregation would eventually govern everybody else's conduct. Somebody could object to a particular meal, another to clothing, another to a recreational activity, and another to any practice he had personally abandoned. Before long, Christian liberty would be buried beneath a mountain of human preferences. Romans 14 does not establish such an arrangement. The chapter concerns conscience and the danger of encouraging someone to act contrary to his conviction before God. The weaker brother is not simply the loudest critic or the person most eager to issue accusations. He is someone whose spiritual welfare may genuinely be endangered by another believer's conduct. Scripture requires charity, but charity does not require surrendering biblical authority to every opinion that happens to become offended.

First Corinthians 8 provides a particularly clear illustration. Paul addresses meat associated with idols, explaining that an idol possesses no genuine divine authority. Yet some believers, accustomed to their former idolatrous practices, continued associating such food with the idol. First Corinthians 8:9 warns, “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.” Verse 10 describes the weaker believer observing another person eating in an idol's temple and being emboldened to act contrary to his own conscience. The danger is not simply that he dislikes what somebody else is doing. His observation encourages him toward conduct he regards as wrong. That is the serious spiritual problem. The knowledgeable believer's action becomes an influence that helps another person violate conscience. There is a considerable difference between a man expressing disagreement and a man being encouraged toward sin. The Bible recognizes that difference, and honest teaching must preserve it.

Apply that distinction carefully to alcohol. A person who sincerely believes every Christian should abstain may disagree with someone who consumes an occasional drink. Disagreement alone does not automatically establish that the drinker has caused him to stumble. But consider a recovering alcoholic who has learned that returning to alcohol threatens his sobriety. If a respected Christian encourages him to drink, mocks his abstinence, or demonstrates drinking in circumstances likely to embolden him toward relapse, the danger becomes far more serious. First Corinthians 8:12 declares, “But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.” Paul is not discussing wounded pride over losing a debate. He is describing real spiritual injury. **Being offended because someone disagrees with you is not the same thing as being led into sin by their example. One concerns personal objection; the other**

concerns another soul's spiritual welfare. A mature Christian ought to understand the difference before claiming either liberty or injury.

3. Knowledge Without Charity Is a Dangerous Kind of Strength

First Corinthians 8:1 contains a statement that ought to trouble the Christian who prides himself upon having the strongest argument: “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.” Paul does not condemn biblical knowledge. Without knowledge of Scripture, a believer cannot distinguish sound doctrine from error. But knowledge becomes dangerous when it produces arrogance rather than godliness. The Corinthian believer might correctly understand that an idol was nothing, yet fail to consider the spiritual condition of someone recently delivered from idolatry. His knowledge was accurate, but his application was careless. The same problem appears when a Christian quotes every favorable biblical reference to wine while dismissing the suffering of someone who has battled alcoholism. He may understand that Scripture does not prohibit every instance of drinking. That does not establish that drinking in every circumstance demonstrates wisdom. A man can possess a perfectly sound doctrinal argument and employ it with the spiritual sensitivity of a runaway wagon.

Paul carries the matter further in First Corinthians 8:11: “And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?” This is a severe warning concerning the harmful exercise of liberty. It must be interpreted within the context of spiritual injury rather than used to teach that a saved believer loses eternal life whenever another Christian sets a poor example. The eternal security of the believer rests upon Jesus Christ, not upon perfect conduct by everyone around him. Nevertheless, the warning reveals how seriously God regards the welfare of weaker brethren. Paul does not permit the knowledgeable believer to dismiss their vulnerability simply because his own conscience is clear. The Christian possessing greater understanding should demonstrate greater responsibility, not greater selfishness. If he knows that a particular practice can harm another believer, he possesses more reason to exercise restraint. **The strongest Christian in the room is not necessarily the one who can defend the most liberties. He may be the one who knows exactly when to surrender them.**

First Corinthians 8:13 concludes, “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” That is a remarkable declaration from the apostle who so vigorously defended salvation by grace and freedom from the Mosaic law. Paul was not frightened of Christian liberty. He understood it better than the Corinthians he was correcting. Yet he was prepared to surrender a lawful practice indefinitely if exercising it would genuinely lead his brother into sin. Imagine explaining that principle to somebody who insists his entire evening will be ruined unless alcohol is

available. Paul could contemplate giving up meat for the remainder of his earthly life. Some modern Christians cannot contemplate giving up a drink for the length of a dinner invitation. The contrast is revealing. The apostle understood that sacrificing a preference does not diminish freedom. It demonstrates that the believer possesses enough self-control to place the welfare of another above his own convenience.

4. The Recovering Brother at Your Table

Consider a Christian who spent years enslaved to alcohol. His drinking damaged his marriage, frightened his children, consumed his money, and brought consequences he would rather forget. Through the grace of God, honest repentance, appropriate assistance, and sustained effort, he has begun establishing a sober life. His family is slowly regaining confidence, and he is learning to face ordinary responsibilities without depending upon the bottle. Then he attends a gathering where another believer proudly announces that Christians are perfectly free to drink. The host may have no difficulty stopping after one glass. He may sincerely believe that his own conduct is permissible. But does he know the circumstances of the man sitting across from him? Does he understand the danger of encouraging somebody whose history makes returning to alcohol particularly risky? The question is not whether every recovering alcoholic will relapse after witnessing another person drink. The question is whether love requires greater care when a genuine danger is known.

Romans 14:20 declares, “For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.” Paul is speaking about food and conscience, yet the governing principle exposes the folly of sacrificing spiritual welfare to personal appetite. The believer who has fought to escape drinking may need to avoid alcohol altogether. He should not be ridiculed for recognizing that danger, nor should another Christian pressure him into drinking to prove that he understands grace. Romans 14:23 warns against acting without faith and in violation of conscience. A Christian who persuades another person to disregard sincerely held convictions has not necessarily helped him mature. He may have encouraged disobedience. The invitation to fellowship should never become a test of whether a vulnerable believer is willing to abandon the boundaries helping him remain sober. A dinner table ought to be a place of hospitality, not a proving ground for somebody else's drinking philosophy.

This responsibility extends beyond recovering alcoholics. Some people are struggling privately with substance abuse and have never disclosed their difficulties to the congregation. Others may have recently escaped destructive habits and remain especially vulnerable to familiar environments. Christians cannot know every private struggle, and Scripture does not require believers to possess supernatural knowledge of everyone's

circumstances. But when a serious concern becomes known, ordinary Christian charity demands consideration. Philippians 2:4 commands, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” That instruction does not require abandoning every personal preference whenever uncertainty exists. It requires refusing selfish indifference where another person's welfare is at stake. A Christian should be able to enjoy fellowship without insisting upon alcohol, and a host should be able to honor a recovering guest without making the occasion uncomfortable. **If a glass of wine is optional for you but potentially dangerous for your brother, love ought to make the decision considerably easier than pride does.**

5. Little Eyes Are Watching, and Public Voices Carry Farther

Parents possess an influence over their children that cannot be measured merely by the number of instructions delivered around the dinner table. A father may warn his son about drunkenness while repeatedly presenting drinking as the proper reward for a difficult day. A mother may caution her daughter against reckless companions while treating recreational intoxication as an ordinary feature of adult social life. Those examples do not guarantee that the children will imitate their parents, and responsible parents cannot control every future decision their children make. But parental conduct matters. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers to bring their children up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” That responsibility involves more than explaining rules. Children observe how adults handle disappointment, celebrate success, respond to temptation, and exercise self-control. A parent who insists upon the importance of sobriety should consider whether his own example reinforces the warning or makes the warning sound like something intended exclusively for other people.

The question becomes especially serious when parents have witnessed addiction within their extended families. A child may know that alcohol contributed to a grandfather's ruined health, an uncle's imprisonment, or another relative's broken marriage. Such experiences do not establish that every child will develop the same difficulties, but they provide genuine reasons for caution. Imagine a parent carefully warning his children about the destructive consequences of drinking, only to have another respected Christian ridicule those warnings as legalism. The child may begin wondering whether the warnings were merely exaggerated religious preferences. There is no need to claim that every disagreement undermines parental authority, but deliberately dismissing a family's legitimate concerns can create unnecessary confusion. Proverbs 22:6 emphasizes the importance of training a child in the way he should go. A believer who values young people should consider how publicly defending questionable indulgences may influence their understanding of godly

conduct. **Children remember what adults make important, not merely what adults declare forbidden.**

Pastors, Bible teachers, ministry workers, and influential Christians bear additional responsibilities because their conduct may communicate more than they intend. First Timothy 3:2 requires a bishop to be vigilant and sober, while verse 3 specifies that he must be "Not given to wine." Titus 1:7 repeats the warning concerning a bishop, and First Timothy 3:8 addresses deacons regarding excessive attachment to wine. Those qualifications must not be carelessly rewritten into claims that every appearance of wine is identical or that every Christian leader who has ever consumed alcohol is automatically disqualified. Nevertheless, they unmistakably demonstrate that sobriety and freedom from domination by drink are serious matters in spiritual leadership. James 3:1 likewise warns that teachers receive greater judgment. A pastor who publicly celebrates drinking may communicate permission far beyond the precise limits he intends. His example carries influence because people trust his spiritual judgment. **The higher a man stands in the eyes of others, the farther his example can travel when he steps in the wrong direction.**

6. Calling Every Abstainer a Legalist Does Not Make You Spiritual

Galatians 5:1 declares, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." In its doctrinal setting, Paul is confronting false teaching that attempted to place believers under the Mosaic law as a requirement for justification. The issue is salvation and standing before God, not a guarantee that every personal indulgence must be exercised to prove Christian freedom. A believer who insists that abstaining from alcohol earns salvation or establishes righteousness before God has departed from the gospel of grace. But a Christian who voluntarily abstains because he recognizes the dangers of alcohol, wishes to protect his testimony, or desires to avoid becoming a stumblingblock has not thereby become a legalist. He may be exercising entirely proper biblical judgment. The fellow who calls every abstainer a Pharisee ought to remember that Paul himself was prepared to surrender lawful privileges for the welfare of others. Apparently, even the apostle would have trouble satisfying some modern defenders of liberty.

Romans 14:4 asks, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth." That verse ought to restrain both sides of a dispute concerning matters Scripture does not universally prohibit. The abstaining Christian should not automatically accuse every occasional drinker of drunkenness, addiction, or rebellion without evidence. The Christian who believes moderate consumption is permissible should not mock abstinence, pressure others to violate conscience, or dismiss legitimate concerns as religious ignorance. Both are accountable to the Lord. Yet this balance must not become

an excuse for refusing to confront actual drunkenness, dangerous conduct, or the deliberate endangerment of another believer. Scripture establishes moral boundaries, and those boundaries remain authoritative regardless of personal opinion. The distinction is between respecting conscience in disputable matters and excusing behavior God plainly condemns. A man can refuse to manufacture commandments while still making wise decisions about conduct. **You do not have to declare every drinker lost to explain why leaving the bottle alone may be the wisest decision you ever make.**

There is another form of bondage that deserves attention: the need to demonstrate liberty through constant public defense of one's preferences. A Christian may become so determined to prove that he is not under legalism that he begins treating every suggestion of voluntary restraint as a personal insult. That is an unusual expression of freedom. Galatians 5:13 commands believers not to use liberty as an occasion to the flesh, “but by love serve one another.” The purpose of Christian liberty is not to enthrone personal desire. The believer has been freed from the condemnation of the law through Jesus Christ and called to a life of obedience. If he chooses to abstain for the welfare of another, he has not surrendered his standing in Christ. He has exercised liberty in the service of charity. Nobody needs to drink alcohol to prove he understands grace. Nobody needs to mock the abstainer to demonstrate doctrinal intelligence. **Christian liberty is not measured by how many questionable things a man insists upon doing, but by whether his freedom remains governed by the Lord who purchased him.**

7. Whether Ye Eat or Drink, Do All to the Glory of God

First Corinthians 10:31 declares, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” That command follows Paul's careful instruction concerning liberty, conscience, and the circumstances surrounding food associated with idolatrous worship. He is not requiring every ordinary activity to become a formal religious ceremony. He is establishing that the believer's conduct must remain subject to the glory of God. Verse 32 continues, “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.” Notice the distinctions. Paul recognizes Jews, Gentiles, and the Church rather than confusing Israel's national identity with the body of Christ. He is instructing Church Age believers concerning conduct before different groups of people. Verse 33 emphasizes the spiritual profit of many “that they may be saved.” Paul's concern extends beyond defending personal privileges. He wants his conduct to serve the purposes of the gospel. That is a considerably greater objective than proving he can enjoy a particular meal or beverage.

First Thessalonians 5:22 adds, “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” The verse is frequently quoted, and its wording deserves careful handling. In the immediate context, Paul instructs

believers not to despise prophesyings, to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good. The command concerning evil follows that instruction and requires believers to reject evil rather than embrace it. It should not be twisted into a claim that every activity someone dislikes automatically becomes sinful because it might appear questionable to a critic. Such reasoning would place Christian conduct under the endless rule of public suspicion. Nevertheless, the command gives no encouragement to cultivate evil or treat spiritual appearances carelessly. When alcohol use has become associated with actual drunkenness, destructive influence, or the deliberate encouragement of another person's weakness, the Christian cannot dismiss the matter by announcing that appearances never count. Biblical discernment considers what a practice actually involves and what influence it may reasonably exert.

The Christian must therefore examine his conduct through more than the narrow question of personal permission. Does it glorify God? Does it preserve sober judgment? Does it create a foreseeable occasion for another believer to fall? Does it strengthen the testimony of Christ or unnecessarily undermine it? Does exercising the liberty serve some worthwhile purpose, or has the defense become more important than the practice itself? Philippians 2:3 commands, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” That is the spirit in which Christian freedom ought to operate. A man should not manufacture religious restrictions, but neither should he insist upon exercising a questionable privilege merely to prove that nobody can tell him otherwise. **The believer who can surrender a lawful pleasure for the good of another has not become less free. He has demonstrated that his freedom is not governed by his appetite.** That is Christian maturity worth possessing.

Conclusion — The Testimony You Never Considered May Be the One That Matters Most

The apostle Paul never treated Christian liberty as an excuse for selfish indifference. He understood justification by grace, freedom from the Mosaic law, the believer's standing in Christ, and the difference between genuine commandments and human restrictions. Yet he repeatedly commanded believers to consider conscience, charity, edification, and the welfare of weaker brethren. Romans 14:21 specifically includes wine among the things a Christian may choose to surrender when exercising liberty would cause another to stumble. First Corinthians 8 warns that knowledge without charity can injure another believer. First Corinthians 10 demands conduct governed by God's glory and the profit of others. These instructions do not establish that every instance of drinking is inherently sinful, nor do they authorize the loudest critic to dictate everybody else's conscience. They establish something more searching: Christian freedom carries responsibilities that cannot be dismissed merely because an individual believes his own conduct is permissible. **A**

personal liberty becomes a serious spiritual problem when defending it matters more than protecting the people Christ died to save.

Somebody may be watching whose circumstances are entirely different from yours. The recovering alcoholic who cannot safely return to drinking may regard your example as permission to experiment again. The young believer may mistake your personal practice for a universal biblical endorsement. The impressionable child may remember your enthusiasm for alcohol long after forgetting the careful qualifications you offered in its defense. You cannot control every conclusion another person reaches, and Scripture does not command you to live enslaved to every possible misunderstanding. But where genuine spiritual danger is known or reasonably foreseeable, Christian love demands consideration. A pastor should consider the weight of his influence, a parent should consider the lessons established by example, and every believer should consider whether a temporary pleasure is worth placing another person in danger. The Christian who genuinely possesses liberty should have no difficulty surrendering it when charity requires restraint. There is nothing particularly impressive about maintaining the right to enjoy something another person may suffer from imitating.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not purchase the Church with His blood so believers could devote their lives to defending every indulgence they could justify. Salvation is by grace through faith, not earned through abstinence, and eternal life does not depend upon maintaining a spotless record of outward conduct. Nevertheless, the grace that saves believers also teaches them to deny ungodliness and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. First Corinthians 6:12 declares, “I will not be brought under the power of any.” Romans 14:21 declares that abstaining from wine is good when exercising that liberty would harm a brother. Those truths belong together. A Christian ought to possess enough freedom to refuse what he does not need, enough wisdom to recognize when his example carries danger, and enough love to place another person's welfare above his own preference. **You may be able to stop after one drink, but the man watching you may not be able to stop after twenty. You may call it liberty, but he may discover bondage. And when love asks you to leave the bottle alone, the strongest testimony is not another argument explaining why you have the right to drink. It is the willingness to put down the glass because your brother is worth more than what is in it.**

10 of 10 — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety — Be Not Drunk With Wine, but Be Filled With the Spirit: Who Is Controlling Your Life?

Key Passage: Ephesians 5:18 — "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;"

There comes a point when a Christian needs to stop arguing about how much of the world he can enjoy and begin asking how much of his life he is willing to surrender to Jesus Christ. After examining the deception of the bottle, the excuses of social drinking, the destruction of households, the tragedy of impaired driving, the dangers of recreational drugs, the proper place of medicine, and the misery of addiction, we arrive at the command that brings the entire matter into focus. Ephesians 5:18 declares, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." There is the contrast. One influence can cloud judgment, weaken restraint, and bring a man beneath the power of his appetite. The other directs the believer toward obedience, godliness, thanksgiving, and fellowship with the living God. The world has developed an impressive collection of methods for altering human consciousness, but the Holy Ghost has not changed His instructions. **A Christian ought not spend his life demanding the right to be under the influence of the world when God has commanded him to be filled with the Spirit.**

There is something astonishing about the amount of energy people devote to defending practices they repeatedly insist are unnecessary. A man will announce that he does not need alcohol, cannot be controlled by it, and can surrender it whenever he pleases. Then somebody suggests that leaving it alone might be the wiser decision, and suddenly the fellow acts as though somebody has confiscated his inheritance. He can quote Christian liberty, explain the wedding at Cana, discuss Timothy's stomach, and deliver an impressive speech about personal freedom. But ask whether he is walking circumspectly, redeeming the time, and submitting his appetites to the Lord, and the discussion becomes considerably less entertaining. The question is not whether Scripture explicitly condemns every instance of alcohol consumption. It does not. Neither does every legitimate medication constitute sinful intoxication. But Scripture plainly condemns drunkenness and calls believers to sobriety, temperance, and spiritual obedience. A man who can spend an entire evening explaining why he is allowed to have another drink ought to be able to spend five minutes explaining why he needs one.

The final issue is not merely the contents of a glass, the substances inside a prescription bottle, or the chemicals someone uses to escape reality. It is the authority governing the believer's conduct. I have seen what alcohol can do in homes, prisons, and hospitals, and those experiences make it impossible to treat the subject as some harmless theological amusement. There are people who have lost families, freedom, health, and testimony while insisting that they remained in control. Yet the biblical answer must go deeper than simply declaring that everybody ought to quit drinking. A man can abandon alcohol and

remain as worldly, selfish, proud, and spiritually useless as he was before. He may exchange one ruling appetite for another and congratulate himself because the replacement carries a more respectable label. The Lord is not merely interested in removing a bottle from somebody's hand. He commands the redeemed man to yield his life to God. **Sobriety is necessary where intoxication has ruled, but the ultimate Christian objective is not simply an empty bottle. It is a life governed by the Holy Spirit.**

1. Walk Circumspectly: God Never Commanded His Children to Live Carelessly

Ephesians 5:15 declares, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” Paul is writing to the Church, addressing those who have been saved by grace and brought into a new relationship with Jesus Christ. The doctrinal foundation has already been established in the earlier chapters of Ephesians. Believers are saved by grace through faith, made members of Christ's body, and instructed concerning their position in Him. Beginning in Ephesians 4, Paul places particular emphasis upon the Christian's practical walk. The saved man must no longer live as he formerly lived. He is commanded to put off corrupt conduct, walk in love, reject the works of darkness, and demonstrate godliness in ordinary life. Therefore, the command to walk circumspectly does not appear in isolation. It belongs to an extended appeal for conduct consistent with salvation. A Christian cannot rightly divide the Bible by separating his heavenly position from every earthly responsibility. **The grace that places a man in Christ does not give him permission to walk through this world with his spiritual eyes closed.**

The expression “not as fools, but as wise” establishes a distinction frequently overlooked in arguments concerning Christian liberty. The issue is not always whether a specific action can be identified as expressly forbidden under every conceivable circumstance. Sometimes the more searching question concerns wisdom. Proverbs 14:12 declares, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” The believer who walks circumspectly examines his surroundings, considers his responsibilities, and recognizes danger before voluntarily approaching it. A man may insist that he can consume intoxicating substances without experiencing obvious consequences, but that assertion does not eliminate the requirement to exercise judgment. The Christian who knows that alcohol has become a destructive influence in his family, who has previously struggled with dependence, or who recognizes that his example may encourage another person toward sin has excellent reasons to refuse it. Wisdom does not need to manufacture another commandment when the existing biblical principles already illuminate the danger.

Ephesians 5:16 continues, “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” There is another consideration the world seldom includes in its advertisements for intoxication. Time is a stewardship entrusted to the believer, and life is not an endless supply of evenings that can be squandered without consequence. Some people lose entire periods of useful activity through drunkenness, hangovers, drug use, and the disorder associated with destructive habits. Others spend considerable time planning, financing, defending, and recovering from indulgences that accomplish nothing worthwhile. This does not mean every moment of recreation is sinful. Scripture recognizes legitimate rest and ordinary enjoyment. But the believer must consider whether his conduct is redeeming time or wasting it. Ephesians 5:17 adds, “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” That command ought to settle the direction of the Christian's priorities. **A man who keeps asking how much foolishness he can fit into his liberty has already demonstrated that he needs a fresh examination of wisdom.**

2. Be Not Drunk With Wine: The False Master That Promises Freedom

Ephesians 5:18 begins with a direct prohibition: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.” There is no uncertainty about the command. Drunkenness is forbidden to the New Testament believer. Paul does not recommend it in moderation, excuse it during celebrations, or permit it whenever somebody experiences a difficult week. The word “excess” describes the disorder associated with drunkenness, and the prohibition stands within a context demanding careful, wise, and obedient conduct. The verse does not expressly declare that every quantity of alcoholic wine constitutes drunkenness, and faithful Bible exposition has no authority to insert words God did not give. Nevertheless, the absence of that universal statement does not make intoxication acceptable. Galatians 5:19–21 also identifies drunkenness among the works of the flesh. A Christian who deliberately becomes intoxicated cannot defend his conduct by locating another passage where wine appears favorably. God did not inspire one verse to provide an escape route from another.

The danger of intoxication reaches beyond the immediate experience of pleasure. Proverbs 23:29–35 describes sorrow, contention, foolish speech, impaired judgment, injuries, and the determination to return for another drink after suffering its consequences. Proverbs 20:1 declares, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” Those warnings were given within the Old Testament setting of Israel, but the moral dangers they describe did not vanish when the Church Age began. A man can become foolish under the influence of alcohol just as surely today as he could when Solomon's proverbs were first delivered. The difference is that modern intoxication may involve automobiles traveling at highway speeds, powerful medications, and substances

prepared in concentrations unknown to earlier generations. Technology has increased the reach of human foolishness without improving the old nature responsible for it. The bottle may have acquired a more expensive label, but the serpent described in Proverbs has not lost its fangs.

The false promise of intoxication is that surrendering control will somehow produce greater freedom. A man drinks because he wants to relax, becomes dependent because he believes the substance makes life easier, and eventually discovers that the habit has begun determining how he lives. First Corinthians 6:12 declares, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” Paul understood that personal mastery matters. The believer must not allow an appetite to become an authority demanding obedience. Not everyone who consumes alcohol develops addiction, and physical dependence arising during legitimate medical treatment requires careful distinction from deliberate abuse. But where an intoxicating habit has begun governing conduct, the Christian must confront the reality without excuses. **A man is not free merely because he can choose which bottle to purchase. Freedom is demonstrated when he can refuse the bottle without having to obey its demands.**

3. Be Filled With the Spirit: The Influence That Produces Obedience

The second half of Ephesians 5:18 presents the positive command: “but be filled with the Spirit.” Notice that Paul does not merely instruct believers to avoid drunkenness and leave the rest of their spiritual lives unattended. The prohibition is followed by an instruction concerning the Holy Spirit. This command is addressed to people who have already believed the gospel. Ephesians 1:13 declares that believers, after hearing the word of truth and trusting Christ, were “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” Ephesians 4:30 likewise warns believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, “whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” The sealing of the believer and the filling of the Spirit must not be confused. The believer receives the Spirit in connection with salvation; the command to be filled concerns the ongoing practical walk. A Christian does not become more eternally saved by obtaining additional portions of the Holy Ghost. He is commanded to live in submission to the Spirit already dwelling within him.

The filling of the Spirit is not presented in Ephesians 5 as a chemically induced sensation, an uncontrolled emotional performance, or a temporary experience in which the believer abandons his faculties. Some people have managed to confuse spiritual power with outward excitement to such an extent that they seem disappointed when a genuine work of God produces ordinary obedience rather than extraordinary noise. But Paul immediately describes the conduct associated with Spirit-filled living. Ephesians 5:19 speaks of

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Verse 20 commands thanksgiving to God, and verse 21 instructs believers concerning submission to one another in the fear of God. There is the inspired description surrounding the command. Spiritual worship, thanksgiving, reverence, and godly relationships belong to the Spirit-filled life. **The Holy Ghost does not need to make a man lose control of himself in order to demonstrate that God has gained influence over him.**

There is also a practical distinction between the temporary effects of intoxication and the lasting character produced through obedience to God. Alcohol may temporarily change mood, confidence, or perception, but those effects do not constitute spiritual growth. Recreational drugs may create unusual sensations, but unusual sensations are not evidence of fellowship with the Lord. A person may feel extraordinarily important during an intoxicating experience while remaining spiritually empty when it ends. Ephesians 5 directs the believer toward something entirely different. He is to live in continuing obedience, offering thanksgiving, maintaining godly relationships, and worshipping the Lord. Colossians 3:16 presents a closely related description, commanding believers to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly, with teaching, admonition, and spiritual songs. Scripture and the Spirit are not competing influences. The believer filled with the Spirit will not become indifferent toward the Book the Spirit inspired. **The world offers a temporary feeling that wears off. God commands a spiritual walk that ought to continue long after the excitement of the moment has disappeared.**

4. The Works of the Flesh and the Fruit of the Spirit Are Not the Same Harvest

Galatians 5:16 declares, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” Paul is writing to believers who had been troubled by false teaching concerning the law and justification. His argument establishes salvation and standing before God through faith in Jesus Christ rather than through the works of the law. Nevertheless, the liberty enjoyed by believers does not eliminate the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. Verse 17 declares, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.” There is a conflict within the Christian life that will not be settled by pretending the old nature has become righteous. The saved man is commanded to walk in the Spirit precisely because the flesh continues desiring things contrary to God's will. Salvation does not make temptation imaginary, and Christian liberty does not make surrendering to temptation acceptable.

Galatians 5:19–21 identifies the works of the flesh, including adultery, fornication, idolatry, hatred, strife, drunkenness, and revellings. Those sins are not presented as admirable expressions of personal freedom. Paul condemns them and warns concerning their

consequences. The passage also requires doctrinal care because its warning about inheriting the kingdom of God must not be twisted into salvation by works or the loss of eternal life every time a genuine believer falls. The Christian's salvation rests upon Christ, while his conduct remains subject to divine correction and accountability. First Corinthians 6:11 identifies believers who had formerly practiced serious wickedness but were washed, sanctified, and justified through the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet those same Christians were commanded to glorify God in their bodies. A redeemed sinner ought not establish permanent residence among the very sins from which Christ has called him. **Grace does not transform drunkenness into righteousness. It calls the drunkard to something better than defending his bondage.**

Galatians 5:22–23 describes the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance.” Notice the final word. Temperance concerns self-control, and self-control is particularly important when discussing intoxicating substances and destructive appetites. The believer should demonstrate an increasing ability to refuse what is wrong, govern his conduct, and respond to circumstances without surrendering to every passing desire. That does not mean a Christian suffering addiction will achieve complete recovery through one dramatic decision, nor does it make legitimate medical treatment unnecessary. It establishes the character toward which the Spirit directs the believer. Love should replace selfishness, peace should replace needless conflict, and temperance should replace surrender to appetite. A man cannot manufacture spiritual fruit by merely decorating his life with religious expressions while continuing to embrace deliberate sin. **The fruit of the Spirit does not grow from a bottle, a syringe, or a packet of pills. It grows in a life yielded to the God who commands holiness.**

5. Present Your Bodies: The Christian Does Not Own Himself

Romans 12:1 declares, “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.” The word “therefore” connects Paul's instruction to the doctrinal truths established throughout the preceding chapters. Romans has explained justification by faith, the believer's relationship to sin, life in the Spirit, and God's dealings concerning Israel. Paul now appeals to saved people to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with divine mercy. He is not telling sinners to earn salvation by sacrificing their bodies. He is instructing redeemed people to yield themselves to the Lord. The sacrifice is described as living, which means the believer's responsibility continues through ordinary circumstances rather than being confined to one dramatic moment. What happens in the

home, workplace, automobile, and private life belongs within the scope of that surrender. The body is not an independent possession temporarily rented to its appetites.

First Corinthians 6:19–20 makes the matter even more direct: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” In its immediate context, Paul is condemning fornication and explaining the believer's bodily relationship to Christ. The passage should not be stripped from that setting and converted into a claim that every medicine, ordinary indulgence, or physical discomfort constitutes defilement of the temple. Nevertheless, the principle of ownership is unmistakable. The saved person belongs to God. His body is not morally independent from the Saviour who purchased him. Deliberately pursuing intoxication, damaging judgment, and surrendering responsibility must therefore be examined under divine authority. **The Christian cannot reasonably announce that Jesus Christ owns his soul while insisting that his flesh answers to nobody but itself.**

Romans 12:2 continues, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” There is the answer to a culture that continually invents new explanations for making intoxication respectable. The Christian is not instructed to imitate the world's appetites and then search for verses that might excuse them. He is instructed to resist conformity and experience transformation through a renewed mind. That renewal is not identical to a temporary change in mood produced by a substance. It concerns spiritual understanding, obedience, and the believer's ability to discern the will of God. A Christian may still require legitimate medical treatment for bodily or psychiatric illness; receiving such care does not contradict this command. But deliberately using substances to escape moral responsibility is a different matter. The renewed mind must govern the choices of the mortal body. **The world changes its standards whenever a new appetite becomes popular. The Christian is supposed to have his thinking changed by the word of God, not by the popularity of the appetite.**

6. A Sound Mind Cannot Be Replaced by Another Controlling Habit

Second Timothy 1:7 declares, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” Paul is encouraging Timothy to remain faithful amid opposition and suffering. The verse does not promise that Christians will never experience mental illness, bodily weakness, or conditions requiring medical treatment. But it plainly identifies sound-minded courage and love as qualities consistent with God's work in the believer. A person seeking sobriety should value clear judgment rather than regard impairment as an indispensable source of comfort. There is no spiritual achievement in deliberately clouding the mind to avoid facing life's responsibilities. The Christian will

encounter fear, grief, disappointment, conflict, and weariness. Those difficulties are real, but repeatedly escaping them through intoxication does not provide the lasting wisdom necessary to address them. **A temporary high may change how a man feels about his troubles, but it does not necessarily change the troubles waiting when he comes down.**

There is another danger that deserves attention: exchanging one controlling habit for another. A man may stop drinking but become consumed with gambling, pornography, greed, or another appetite that gradually governs his conduct. The outward behavior has changed, but the old determination to satisfy the flesh remains firmly established. Romans 6:16 asks, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?” Paul is teaching concerning the believer's relationship to sin and righteousness, and the principle exposes the foolishness of continually changing masters without learning obedience to God. This does not mean every enjoyable activity is addictive or that ordinary Christian recreation is inherently suspicious. It means the believer must examine whether a desire has begun controlling him. **Getting out of one prison is a poor victory if a man immediately goes looking for another cell with more comfortable furniture.**

Practical obedience requires practical decisions. The person struggling with alcohol may need to remove opportunities for drinking, avoid companions who encourage relapse, and seek faithful accountability. Someone dependent upon drugs may require qualified treatment, supervised withdrawal, and continuing assistance. Abruptly stopping heavy alcohol use or certain sedative medications can cause life-threatening withdrawal, so medical supervision may be essential. There is no contradiction between seeking the Lord and receiving necessary care. Galatians 6:2 commands believers to bear one another's burdens, while Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual Christians to restore the fallen in meekness. Prayer, Bible reading, responsible fellowship, medical assistance, and honest accountability can serve complementary purposes. Repentance does not consist merely of announcing that yesterday's conduct was wrong. It requires turning from sin and pursuing obedience. **A man who wants a different harvest must stop deliberately planting the same crop.**

7. The Grace That Saves Us Also Teaches Us How to Live

Titus 2:11–12 declares, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” There is the proper relationship between salvation and Christian conduct. Grace brings salvation, and grace teaches the saved person how to live. It does not demand successful recovery from addiction as the price of

eternal life. Neither does it encourage the believer to continue embracing sins that Scripture condemns. The instruction concerns this present world, where temptation remains and obedience must be practiced. The redeemed person is commanded to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, not defend them through clever arguments. **Grace is not an agreement allowing the flesh to remain in charge. It is God's instruction that the man saved by Christ should no longer live as though sin holds the title deed to his life.**

Titus 2:13 continues, “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” The Church's expectation of Christ must influence its present conduct. The believer is not waiting for divine wrath to establish his salvation, nor is he attempting to earn a place in heaven through personal sobriety. He is looking for the Saviour who purchased him and will complete the redemption of His people. First Thessalonians 4:16–17 describes the catching away of believers to meet the Lord, while Second Corinthians 5:10 establishes the future judgment seat of Christ. Those events must not be confused with the Second Advent in judgment or the Great White Throne. The Christian's blessed hope should encourage faithful service rather than careless indulgence. A man expecting to meet his Saviour ought to have greater ambitions than defending every worldly pleasure he can possibly excuse.

Titus 2:14 declares concerning Jesus Christ, “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Notice the purpose accompanying redemption. Christ gave Himself for sinners, and those who belong to Him are called to lives marked by godliness and useful service. The believer should not confuse zeal for good works with attempting to purchase salvation. The works follow redemption; they do not accomplish it. But the Christian who has been delivered from condemnation ought to desire deliverance from destructive conduct as well. Whether he has never touched alcohol or has spent years struggling to escape it, the calling remains the same. Walk in the Spirit, practice temperance, seek righteousness, and serve the Lord. **The Christian life is not measured by how many bottles a man can defend, but by whether the Lord Jesus Christ is being honored through the life He redeemed.**

Conclusion — Who Is Controlling Your Life?

We have examined the warnings against drunkenness, the excuses surrounding social drinking, the misuse of Scripture, the devastation of families, the danger of impaired driving, the consequences of recreational drugs, and the struggle against addiction. We have distinguished necessary medicine from deliberate abuse and recognized the responsibility Christians bear toward weaker brethren. Through it all, one question has remained: Who is controlling your life? The world offers substances promising confidence,

comfort, pleasure, and escape. Scripture commands sobriety, wisdom, temperance, and obedience. The bottle may promise friendship, but it cannot produce the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Drugs may temporarily alter perception, but they cannot provide the peace of God. A man may spend his life pursuing another experience while neglecting the Saviour who offers something infinitely greater. **The world keeps selling temporary escapes from reality while God commands His children to live faithfully within it.**

If you have never surrendered yourself to destructive drinking or drug use, thank God and remain watchful. If you have defended questionable habits, examine them honestly beneath the authority of Scripture. If you are struggling with addiction, do not confuse another failure with permission to abandon the battle. Seek the Lord, confess wrongdoing where it exists, obtain appropriate assistance, and pursue a sober life through wise and accountable decisions. A person suffering dependence may need qualified medical treatment, and seeking that treatment is not an act of unbelief. Neither is salvation obtained by achieving sobriety. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes eternal salvation by grace through faith, and the believer's security rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. But those who belong to Him are called to walk in obedience. **The grace of God does not require a sinner to become sober before he may trust Christ, but it certainly gives the saved man no reason to celebrate remaining enslaved to sin.**

Return finally to Ephesians 5:18: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” There is the final verdict and the proper direction of the Christian life. God has not called His children to spend their days negotiating with the flesh over how much intoxication they can enjoy without consequences. He has commanded them to walk circumspectly, redeem the time, understand His will, and live beneath the influence of His Spirit. The world can offer another bottle, another pill, another high, and another temporary escape. It cannot offer eternal redemption through any of them. Jesus Christ gave Himself for sinners, and the believer who has been bought with that precious price belongs to Him. So stop measuring freedom by the number of indulgences you can defend. Measure your conduct by the Scriptures, your stewardship by your obedience, and your testimony by the Lord you profess to serve. **A bottle can influence your judgment, a drug can alter your senses, and an appetite can become your master. But none of them can accomplish what the Holy Spirit produces in a life yielded to God. The Christian has no business fighting to remain under the influence of something he ought to be free to refuse, when the living God has commanded him to be filled with the Spirit.**

Conclusion — Alcohol, Drugs, and Sobriety

What the Bible Says About Being Under the Influence

After ten essays examining alcohol, drugs, addiction, sobriety, Christian liberty, shattered families, impaired driving, prescription medications, and the responsibility of a believer before Almighty God, we have arrived at a conclusion that the world would rather avoid. The Bible does not need modern society's permission to tell the truth about intoxication. It did not consult the liquor industry before declaring that wine is a mocker, and it did not ask the pharmaceutical companies, marijuana advocates, or social drinking enthusiasts whether sobriety was still fashionable. Proverbs 20:1 declares, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” That verse has not changed, and neither has human nature. The bottles may be more expensive, the advertisements more sophisticated, and the excuses more carefully rehearsed, but the warnings remain. Some people have spent considerable energy explaining why they should be permitted to indulge, while others have been quietly suffering from the consequences of indulgence. And that is the tragedy of this entire discussion. **The people most determined to defend the bottle are not always the people who have been forced to live with what the bottle can do.**

Throughout this series, we have attempted to deal honestly with Scripture rather than manufacture commandments that God never gave. The Bible does not explicitly condemn every instance of alcohol consumption, and we have not pretended otherwise. Jesus Christ turned water into wine at Cana, Paul gave Timothy a specific medicinal instruction, and the Scriptures acknowledge wine in different historical circumstances. Those facts belong in the Bible, and anybody claiming to believe the Book must acknowledge them. But acknowledging those passages does not require ignoring Proverbs 23, Ephesians 5, Galatians 5, or the repeated commands concerning sobriety, temperance, wisdom, and self-control. The problem begins when somebody discovers a passage he believes supports his drinking and immediately decides that the rest of the discussion is unnecessary. That is not rightly dividing the word of truth. That is selecting the evidence most favorable to the defendant while asking the Judge to disregard everything else. **A man who searches the Bible only for permission to continue what he already wants to do is not allowing Scripture to govern his appetite. He is attempting to make Scripture serve it.**

We have also confronted the modern drug culture, which seems determined to rename every form of intoxication until the danger disappears beneath the vocabulary. Getting high becomes relaxation, chemical escape becomes personal freedom, and a substance becomes harmless simply because somebody calls it natural or points to its legal status.

Well, poisonous plants are natural too, and the government has never possessed authority to amend the word of God. First Peter 5:8 still commands, “Be sober, be vigilant.” First Thessalonians 5:6 still declares, “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” The Christian has been commanded to exercise spiritual alertness, not deliberately surrender his faculties whenever life becomes uncomfortable. Marijuana, illicit stimulants, opioids used recreationally, hallucinogens, and other intoxicating substances present different dangers, and not every individual experiences the same consequences. But the central spiritual question remains. Why should somebody who belongs to Jesus Christ make recreational intoxication an important part of his life? **Getting high does not bring a man closer to heaven merely because it temporarily lifts his mind above his troubles.**

At the same time, we have made an important distinction between legitimate medical treatment and the deliberate abuse of drugs. A person receiving necessary pain relief, anesthesia, psychiatric treatment, or appropriately prescribed medication is not automatically committing sin. Paul did not condemn Timothy for his recurring infirmities, and Luke was identified as the beloved physician. There is no spiritual virtue in refusing necessary medical care merely to impress somebody with an appearance of superior faith. But the existence of legitimate medicine does not make prescription abuse righteous. A medication intended to relieve suffering can become dangerous when it is taken dishonestly, misused for intoxication, or combined recklessly with other substances. Physical dependence arising during proper medical treatment is not automatically the same thing as addiction, and those distinctions must be respected. Some people require medical supervision to discontinue alcohol or certain medications safely because dangerous withdrawal can be life-threatening. God has commanded wisdom, not recklessness. **The medicine cabinet was never intended to become another avenue of worldly intoxication, but neither was necessary medical treatment intended to become an occasion for religious condemnation.**

Then there are the families. I cannot emphasize this enough because I have seen what drinking can do in places where the public never sees it. There are homes where wives have cried themselves to sleep, husbands have watched their marriages deteriorate, children have hidden from intoxicated parents, and entire households have learned to live around one person's destructive appetite. There are people who have lost their money, employment, reputation, freedom, and health while insisting that they remained in control. Proverbs 23:29 asks, “Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions?” The answer is not always confined to the individual drinking. Sometimes the suffering belongs to the spouse who never touched alcohol. Sometimes it belongs to the child who did not choose the family circumstances into which he was born. Sometimes it belongs to elderly

parents who have spent years pleading with an adult child to seek help. And sometimes it belongs to a family whose loved one was killed by somebody else's decision to drive impaired. **The bottle may have one owner, but it can leave an entire household paying the bill. There are people who never took a drink in their lives and still lost almost everything because somebody else did.**

The tragedy of impaired driving deserves particular attention because it exposes the selfishness that intoxication can produce. A man announces that he knows his limits, only lives a few miles away, and has driven in that condition before. He may sincerely believe those things, but his confidence does not restore impaired judgment or coordination. Proverbs 14:12 warns, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” I have seen enough of the consequences in hospitals and prisons to know that the argument changes considerably after somebody has been injured or killed. The innocent family approaching from the opposite direction did not consent to the driver's decision. They did not attend his gathering, purchase his alcohol, or agree to gamble their lives upon his confidence. Romans 13:10 declares, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” That settles the moral responsibility plainly enough. **A man may choose to drink, but he has no right to make innocent strangers bear the consequences of his intoxication. The people who never came home are worth more than the drink he refused to surrender.**

But perhaps one of the most important lessons in these ten essays concerns the difference between condemning drunkenness and abandoning the person struggling with it. It is easy to stand at a comfortable distance and announce that somebody ought to quit drinking. It is another matter entirely to sit beside a man who has lost nearly everything, hates what alcohol has done to him, and still struggles to put the bottle down. I have known enough people in difficult circumstances to understand that the chains of addiction can be terribly strong. Some have sincerely trusted Jesus Christ, experienced substantial periods of sobriety, and later returned to destructive habits. Their failures must not be excused, but neither should we automatically pronounce them lost because they are fighting a serious struggle. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not works. Eternal life is not earned by abandoning alcohol, and it is not maintained through perfect human performance. Nevertheless, grace does not make drunkenness acceptable. **The man who falls into the ditch needs somebody willing to help him out, but helping him does not require pretending that the ditch is a perfectly respectable place to live.**

There is also something spiritually revealing about the way certain Christians respond whenever this subject is raised. Some immediately assume they are being personally accused. Others become determined to defend their right to have an occasional drink,

even when nobody has identified them or questioned their conduct. But not every sermon is directed at the person who happens to be reading it. There may be somebody struggling privately with addiction who needs the warning. There may be a young believer experimenting with drugs who needs biblical correction before the consequences become serious. There may be a family searching for answers because somebody they love is destroying himself. There may be a recovering alcoholic who needs encouragement to remain sober. And there may be someone who has never experienced any of these struggles but needs to understand how to help those who have. **Sometimes the person most offended by a warning is not the person who most desperately needs it. A Christian ought to possess enough charity to recognize that God's word may be helping somebody else while challenging his own assumptions.** Philippians 2:4 commands, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

That brings us back to Christian liberty, because this subject has exposed something worth examining. First Corinthians 6:12 declares, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” Paul understood that the question was not merely whether a believer could locate permission for something. The question also concerned wisdom, spiritual profit, self-control, and mastery. There is something peculiar about a person who insists that alcohol means nothing to him while fighting so vigorously against the suggestion of surrendering it. If it is genuinely unnecessary, why does defending it become so necessary? If giving it up costs nothing important, why does the suggestion produce such resistance? Those questions do not prove that every occasional drinker is addicted, but they certainly deserve honest consideration. Romans 14:21 reminds us that abstaining from wine is good when exercising liberty would cause a brother to stumble. **Christian freedom is not demonstrated by how many questionable things a believer can defend. Sometimes its clearest demonstration is the willingness to surrender something permissible because another person's welfare matters more.**

We have also seen why believers must never confuse the correction of sin with the condemnation of suffering people. There are Christians who have fought terrible battles with alcohol or drugs, experienced repeated disappointment, and still desire to walk faithfully with the Lord. They need honest accountability, biblical counsel, appropriate medical assistance where necessary, and the encouragement of other believers. They do not need another collection of excuses, but neither do they need arrogant spectators announcing that recovery ought to be easy because somebody else has never struggled with the same problem. Galatians 6:1 commands restoration “in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” That instruction should restrain the self-

righteous man who enjoys exposing failure while remaining unwilling to help the fallen. A church should be a place where sin is confronted and repentance is encouraged, not a place where people are required to pretend that every serious struggle has already disappeared. Families deserve protection, vulnerable people deserve safety, and genuine restoration requires more than emotional promises. **Truth without charity may leave a struggling man in despair, while charity without truth may leave him comfortably enslaved. The Christian is commanded to offer something better than either extreme.**

And let us remember that freedom from alcohol or drugs is not the final objective of the Christian life. A man can stop drinking and remain proud, selfish, covetous, dishonest, or spiritually indifferent. He may abandon one appetite only to surrender himself to another. The Lord Jesus Christ did not come merely to produce respectable behavior in people who remain lost without Him. He came to save sinners. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is the gift of God, received by grace through faith. But the grace that saves also teaches the believer how to live. Titus 2:11–12 declares that Christians should deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." That is more than a command to remove a particular substance from daily life. It is a call to live under the authority of the Saviour who purchased us. **A man may put down the bottle and still need to surrender his heart. Sobriety is important, but the Christian life is meant to be governed by something greater than the absence of intoxication.**

So we finish where the Scriptures direct us, with Ephesians 5:18: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." There is the final contrast. The world offers another drink, another drug, another temporary high, and another escape from responsibilities that will still be waiting when the effects wear off. God commands His children to walk circumspectly, redeem the time, exercise temperance, love their brethren, and live under the influence of the Holy Spirit. If these essays have caused someone to examine a questionable habit, seek help for addiction, protect his family, reconsider his example, or recognize the suffering of another person, then they have accomplished something worthwhile. And if somebody has been struggling privately, remember that the purpose of exposing the bondage is not to persuade you that deliverance is impossible. It is to tell you that the bondage must not be accepted as your permanent master. Seek the Lord, receive the help you need, and refuse to make peace with what is destroying your life. **The world will keep offering another bottle, another pill, and another excuse. But the Christian has been called to something higher. You do not need to lose your mind to find peace, surrender your judgment to experience joy, or place your life beneath the power of a substance to discover freedom. Jesus Christ has already paid the price for your redemption. Stop fighting for the right to remain under the influence of something**

that can destroy you, and start living under the influence of the Holy Spirit who dwells within you.

