

Ephesians 5:18 (HCSB)

And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit

ALCOHOL AND THE CHRISTIAN

intro: why spend a Sunday talking about alcohol?

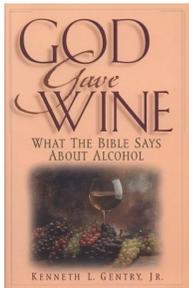
Exegetical reasons: the main point of this text is the Holy Spirit, but it does allude to alcohol.

Pastoral reasons: in 10 years as a church, we've never treated this topic from the pulpit.

We also recognize that few things are as destructive in our culture as alcohol

- some of you were abused because of alcohol
- some of you lost your marriages
 - there's something special about alcohol....that's why we're taking a Sunday
 - So we will devote one week to the topic of alcohol, and an entire Summer to the topic of the Holy Spirit!

God Gave Wine: What The Bible Says About Alcohol by Kenneth L. Gentry.



What does the Bible say in general?

Creation is not inherently bad. The Bible is not Platonic or Gnostic.

Romans 14:14 "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself"

Alcohol in itself does not constitute a glass of evil. However...

Anything can become morally wrong by the way it's used.

What does the Bible say specifically?

All good things can be abused. Therefore, God gives us parameters.

THE LAW: there's 241 verses pertaining to alcohol.¹ We can summarize the Law in four...

1. Don't go against your conscience **AP!**

Romans 14:23 Whoever doubts stands condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from a conviction, and everything that is not from a conviction is sin.

- **caveat:** your conscience must be shaped by Scripture, and renewed by the Spirit
- **caveat:** your conscience may be seared---you think wrong choices are right.

2. Don't be drunk² **AP!**

Ephesians 5:18 And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit.

3. Don't be addicted³

1 Corinthians 6:12 (ESV) "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.

- **caveat:** you may not be addicted, but you love it too much. This is idolatry.

4. Don't stumble a weaker brother

1. more on this later

What does the Gospel have to say?

If you follow the law in this matter, it becomes an issue of the gospel.

¹ The Old Testament mentions alcohol 206 times, while the New Testament has 34 occurrences.

² See also Prov. 23:29-30; Gal. 5:19; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:10

³ In addition to the clear commands of Scripture not to be enslaved to anything, there are also contextual exhortations given to deacons (1 Tim. 3:8), elders (Titus 1:7), and older women (Titus 2:3) not to become addicted to wine.

The gospel: you are neither accepted or rejected by God because of what you eat or do not eat...

1 Corinthians 8:8

Food will not make us acceptable to God. We are not inferior if we don't eat, and we are not better if we do eat.

This is often referred to as *Christian Freedom*.

If the Bible does not explicitly or implicitly forbid something, it is an issue of Christian freedom. After you've done all that the Bible and your conscience⁴ does require, do what you want.

Christian freedom affects many things, not just drinking

We are faced with multiple-choice where we must make Spirit-led, wise decisions, yet where neither of the available choices are "holy" *in themselves*...

- public, private or home school
- parenting methodology
- vegetarian/vegan/meat/gluten-free
- married or single
- musical styles

If the Bible doesn't forbid it, it is a gospel issue---you must make a wise judgment. But you are not better than another person for making it. The gospel just frees you to do so.

The gospel frees you to partake or abstain.

If your conscience doesn't condemn you, if you can abstain from drunkenness, if you are not an alcoholic, and if no one else is being stumbled by it, then...

The gospel *generally* permits a Christian to drink alcohol.

There is no condemnation! Enjoy yourself without shame!

Ecclesiastes 9:7

Go, eat your bread with pleasure, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already accepted your works.⁵

But the gospel also permits a Christian to abstain from alcohol.

Some of you are drinking and you *shouldn't* be. Maybe God is calling you to abstain even though you've done nothing wrong. The gospel says that *you don't need alcohol to be made whole!* So you can't let go of something, it's not *Christian freedom*---it's bondage. You are no less righteous for abstaining, in fact, abstaining for you *is* Christian liberty...

Romans 14:6b

Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and **whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, yet he thanks God.**

⁴ "No man can bind the conscience of another on an issue that is not condemned by Scripture either expressly or implicitly." Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. *God Gave Wine: What the Bible Says About Alcohol*. (Lincoln, CA: Oakdown, 2001). 110. However, remember the caveat of point #1: your conscience must be shaped by Scripture.

⁵ See also Psalm 104:14-15

Sermon by Chris Lazo and Britt Merrick. Given on May 26, 2013. Reality Santa Barbara.

The gospel declares that you are accepted by God through faith in Jesus, not by behaviors, eating patterns, or spiritual practices. Since we are *one body in Christ*, this has implications for **how we are to treat one another...**

Romans 14:2-4

One person believes he may eat anything, but one who is weak eats only vegetables. **One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not criticize one who does, because God has accepted him.** Who are you to criticize another's household slave? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand. For the Lord is able to make him stand.

What does love have to say?

You are in a covenant community now...you affect others. Even if the gospel allows you Christian freedom, you are not to use that freedom to cause a brother to stumble.

Romans 14:13

Therefore, let us no longer criticize one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in your brother's way.

What exactly is "stumbling"?

Stumbling does not mean to *offend* a fellow believer.⁶ It means to *ruin* a fellow believer at the very core of their faith in Christ.⁷ Circumcision was a prime example of this. So also was eating food offered to idols...

1 Corinthians 8:4-13

The gospel gave Paul freedom; his freedom is overruled by love.

Examples of "stumbling" someone...⁸

1. for the abstainer

- a. say Christ saves an alcoholic and they are on the road to recovery. But because you used your influence as a mature believer to pressure them into partake in alcohol, they do so against their conscience, and they ruin their life. What was a Christian liberty for you was sin for them. This is on you! You caused a brother to stumble.

2. for the partaker

- a. say someone comes from a background where alcohol was treated maturely, and was a deep part of their familial social interaction. You give them the mad dog because they order wine at the local restaurant. Perhaps they stop drinking around you or even indefinitely, not for reasons of conscience, but because you made them feel less holy for something God never condemned. Their abstinence is now coming from the destructive sin of self-righteousness, and it's your fault. You caused them to stumble.

⁶ D.A. Carson gives an example of how the term "stumble" is often wrongly used: "Suppose you are a Christian who, owing to your cultural background, has always engaged in social drinking. Now you move into a circle that is more socially conservative. Some senior saint comes u to you and says, 'I have to tell you that I am offended by your drinking'...This senior saint is simply manipulating you." *The Cross and Christian Ministry*. 124-125

⁷ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. comments, "when Paul enjoins the strong's concern for the weak, he encourages them to be careful that they not entice or tempt a weak believer into *overtly sinful behavior*. He does not teach that Christians must avoid perturbing other Christians. The words he employs here are much too strong for such a light meaning." *God Gave Wine*. 115

⁸ "Christian liberty is a two-way street paved with love." Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. *God Gave Wine*. 128
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Love give up freedom if that freedom stumbles a weaker brother.
What does Paul mean by weakness?

Weakness does not mean “abstinence”

Paul isn't trying to get anyone to drink

Remember, some of you *should not* drink.

Weakness does not mean “drinking” either

It is an issue revolving around the object of one's faith

Weakness means you still look for acceptance through your actions

- legalism (I am accepted by God if I abstain) <-- weakness
- relativism (I am proving my acceptance by God when I drink) <-- weakness

Point: food and drink aren't the issue--but the maturing of our faith in Christ
A big reason a Christian might abstain from something otherwise permissible is that by *temporarily* becoming weak they will strengthen a weaker brother through the gospel.⁹

Romans 15:1

Now we who are strong have an obligation **to bear the weaknesses of those without strength**, and not to please ourselves.

Paul *frequently* gave up his rights, but he didn't stay in weakness, for it would have been for him a sin! He gave up his rights *temporarily* to win over the weaker brother *permanently*.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Although I am a free man and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win those under the law. To those who are without that law, like one without the law—not being without God's law but within Christ's law—to win those without the law. **To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some.** Now I do all this because of the gospel, so I may become a partner in its benefits.

To be “strengthened” doesn't mean “I can drink now.” That is irrelevant. **Strengthened means being free from performance.**

Christian maturity is often only tangible within relationships...

We know we are maturing when we can accept others vis à vis the gospel.

Romans 14:17 (HCSB)

for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

We know our church is growing in “strength” when our relationships are marked, not by trivial behaviors, but by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

⁹ Kenneth L. Gentry explains, “Temporary abstinence should witness against the sinner's weakness, not against God's creation....When Paul becomes ‘all things to all men’ (e.g., when he abstains from wine in the presence of the weak), he does so with the long-range goal of demonstrating the failure of weakness and the error of the abstentionist and prohibitionist position. In 1 Corinthians 9:22 he writes, ‘To the weak I become weak.’ This is not to encourage them in their weakness; nor is it Paul's adoption of a permanent lifestyle. He continues, ‘To the weak I became weak, *that I might win the weak.*’ Paul's temporary abstinence, for example, would be ultimately to show the weak his error and to win him away from his weakness, his misapprehension of biblical morality. This is not to say that the moderationist seeks to get the ‘weaker’ brother to drink. Rather that we encourage the weaker brother to see the error of his position, not necessarily to change his practice and begin drinking.” Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. *God Gave Wine*. 142

What is Paul saying here? (what is the real issue?)

When alcohol is abused, we lose self-control, and we anesthetize reality

Proverbs 23:29-30

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has conflicts? Who has complaints? Who has wounds for no reason? Who has red eyes? **Those who linger over wine**

Proverbs 23:33

Your eyes will **see strange things**, and you will say **absurd things**

Isaiah 28:7 (HCSB)

These also stagger because of wine and stumble under the influence of beer: priest and prophet stagger because of beer, they are confused by wine. They stumble because of beer, they are muddled in their visions, they stumble in their judgments.

The Holy Spirit provides self-control, and enriches reality by giving us a deeper revelation of the glory of Jesus Christ

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (ESV)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, **beholding the glory of the Lord**, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For **this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit**.

Paul isn't just saying "Stop it!" For with the merciful prohibition of "do not be drunk with wine" comes a promise: instead be filled with the Holy Spirit!

Some of you have checked out because you have no qualms with alcohol. But you work **80 hours a week** because you can't stand the silence of your bedroom. Some of you **sleep all day** because you can't face reality. Some of you **overeat**. Some of you **under-eat**. Some of you **work-out** to alleviate a worse pain. Some of you **drown out** your sorrows in success and human approval. Some of you **self-medicate**. And do you see that none of these things are inherently destructive...good actually. Given for our enjoyment.

They *become* destructive when we use them as a replacement for God, turning from him as the source of hope/security/fulfillment, and turning to various things to deaden the pain of reality.

And he invites us not to deaden our pain by escaping reality, but to wake up to the reality of Jesus who not only overcame the world, but places us with him in heavenly places. This reality is what the filling of the Spirit makes more vivid.

And this "filling" is in the present imperative, meaning *ongoing*.

This is what we're going to study for the next few months.

May the Holy Spirit meet us all this summer. Let's prepare our hearts now.