

Substance Abuse: The Biblical Perspective

Dr. Michael A. Cox

**Original: 3-15-98; Revised: 3-21-99; 3-19-00; 3-17-02; 3-21-04;
4-24-05; 3-19-06; 3-18-07; 8-10-08**

Texts: Gen. 9:20-22; 19:30-38; Deut. 21:20-21; Prov. 20:1; Hos. 7:5-7; Eph. 5:18; 1 Tim. 3:3; 5:23

Topic: Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Central Idea of Message: The Bible and common sense each speak loudly against the use of debilitating substances. Alcohol is a drug to which we have unwisely grown accustomed and accepted, in part because it was legalized years ago; however, it is a terribly lethal substance.

Introduction: A young wife sleepily looks up as a husband comes in the front door. It is 2:27 A.M. "I was worried about you," she says. He stumbles into their bedroom, tumbling onto the bed. She begins to question him. Tempers flare, voices get louder and harsher. "Daddy" strikes. A trickle of blood oozes from the mouth of an abused wife.

A car speeds out of control on a narrow road. Swerving to avoid striking the guardrail it slams head-on into another vehicle. Within the hour a mother answers the phone only to be told by a police officer that her son will not be coming home.

A homeless man is found lying on the street, frozen to death. He had been an electrical engineer before addiction robbed him of his profession, his family, and now his life.

What do these events have in common? All are related to the use of alcohol or other drugs. The scenes are repeated countless times each day in America, often in "the best of families." In a nation whose people boast of being so educated and culturally advanced, somehow we have missed one very simple teaching from the word of God: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

The writer of Proverbs chose strong words to address this sinful, self-destructive, and socially-noxious problem. The language personifies wine and strong drink as beings acting to destroy the dignity and lofty calling of those created to praise and honor God. Under the influence of these deadly substances, people are routinely turned into mockers who malign and make light of things good and true, often scoffing at God himself. The second personality, strong drink, is depicted as a raging

brawler: violent, loud, and uncontrolled. Inhibitions often leave those who ingest alcohol and other drugs. They frequently lose control of themselves, crossing the boundary of civility, leaving heartache and destruction in their wake. Consider the following statistics from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism¹ and a depressing article entitled, "Alcohol Abuse of Mother Linked to Mental Retardation in Newborn."²

I. Alcohol and Other Drugs Rob People of Their **Dignity**

A. Noah (Gen. 9:20-22)

1. Had experienced great miracles
2. God had saved him and his family
3. But Noah also experienced great embarrassment
 - a) When he abused the fruit of the vine
 - b) When he became drunk
 - c) When he undressed in the presence of his children

B. Lot (Gen. 19:30-38)

1. There is nothing dignified about Lot's behavior
2. There is nothing dignified about any of the results of alcohol or drug use we have read
3. Although welcome at fine dinners and festive occasions, there is nothing welcome about these deadly companions known as alcohol and drugs
4. They are mockers opposed to all that is good

C. Drunkards were executed in the Old Testament (Deut. 21:20-21)

1. There is nothing dignified about being executed
2. It is ignoble and humiliating to forfeit your life over a destructive substance

II. Alcohol and Other Drugs Are **Disrespectful, Destructive, and Deceitful** (Prov. 20:1)

A. Disrespectful

1. They are scorners and mockers
2. They respect nothing

B. Destructive

1. Raging is the character of alcohol

¹"The Facts: Substance Abuse,"
<http://www.sbc.net/redirect.asp?url=http://www.erlc.com/>,
 accessed 18 April 2005.

²Reed Karaim, "Alcohol Abuse of Mother Linked to Mental Retardation in Newborn," *Tulsa Daily World*, 12 December 1990.

2. You are in the company of an uncontrollable companion
 3. Alcohol is frequently depicted as the reward for a day of hard work, when in reality it often ends up destroying the life that was established by hard work and sacrifice
 4. These substances lack feet, hands, and minds, thus require a host to act out their character
 5. "Under the influence" is an appropriate phrase, since substances take over one's personality and express themselves through their host
- C. Deceitful
1. Suggests moral straying
 2. Rather than helping improve the situation, they prevent improvement and worsen it
- III. Alcohol and Other Drugs Rob People of Their **Judgment** (Hos. 7:5-7)
- A. Leaders were inflamed with wine instead of honoring their king (v. 5)
 - B. Their judgment was impaired
 1. Drugs and alcohol are chemicals that trigger all sorts of changes in the body and brain
 2. Drinking alcoholic beverages is associated with staggering and going mad (Jer. 25:15-17)
 3. Some changes might make one feel good for awhile
 - a) The changes soon run out or run on too long
 - b) The feelings they cause are artificial and temporary
 - c) They do not leave one feeling happy after the effects wear off
 - d) They can even make the body and brain forget how to feel good without more drugs or more alcohol
 - e) Instead of making plans and dreams of happiness come true, drinking and drugging make people forget how to be happy, enslaving them to more drinking and drugging
 4. Date rape and acquaintance assault
 - a) Most people who are raped or sexually assaulted know the person who attacks them³

³*Sexual Assault and Substance Abuse* (Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, n.d.). See also "Date Rape: What You Should Know,"

- b) About 75 percent of rapists and at least 55 percent of their victims were drinking alcohol or using other drugs before the rape⁴
 - c) Many gang rapes involved alcohol⁵
 - d) According to the law, someone under the influence of alcohol or another drug is considered unable to give informed consent to sexual activity; having sex with such a one is considered rape⁶
 - e) Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol is neither an excuse nor a legal means of defense for one's actions⁷
 - f) Date rape drugs include Rohypnol and GHB (gamma-hydroxybutrate)⁸
- C. Joined hands with mockers (v. 5)
- 1. Most people try drugs or alcohol because someone they know uses drugs or alcohol⁹: dad or mom?
 - 2. There is a word for people who do things out of fear of what others might think: some call it peer pressure but most call it **stupidity**
 - 3. If you leave your decisions up to your friends, you are not being fair to yourself

IV. Alcohol and Other Drugs Produce **Disobedience**

- A. Do not get drunk (Eph. 5:18)
- B. Do not become addicted (1 Tim. 3:3)
- C. What about wine as a medicine (1 Tim. 5:23)?

<http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/date_rape.html>, accessed 18 April 2005.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸"Date Rape: What You Should Know,"
<http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/date_rape.html>, accessed 18 April 2005.

⁹Christina Dye, *Saying 'No'* (Tempe, AZ: d'n Publications, 1990).

1. Up until the twentieth century alcohol was considered one of the number one "cure-alls" in the country, if not the world
2. It was the "magic" ingredient in any number of medicines and potions
3. Today, alcohol is considered neither a cure nor a treatment for much of anything except a hangover, and not a good treatment or cure at that¹⁰
4. Alcohol is a "downer" drug and a **poison** to the body: "blood in alcohol system"
5. It produces side effects that are plainly lethal to one's health¹¹
 - a) Sedative
 - b) Renders a poor quality of sleep
 - c) Disturbs normal sleep pattern: EEG proof
 - d) Fifty percent of all hospital Emergency Room admissions are related to alcohol
6. It is not used much as a medicine anymore
 - a) In another era, before the time of distilled spirits with their much higher alcohol content (up to eight times as much as wine) Jesus could turn water into wine at a wedding (John 2:1-11) and Paul could advise Timothy to use that wine medicinally
 - (1) Curative for wounds (Luke 10:34)
 - (2) Laxative (1 Tim. 5:23)
 - (3) Aided in digestion (1 Tim. 5:23)
 - (4) The issue is not whether or not fermented wine was used but the amount of the alcohol content produced by the wine-making techniques
 - b) Once sanctioned as an anesthetic or medicine for those about to die (Prov. 31:6-7), we now know of far better anesthetics than whiskey, wine, or beer

¹⁰Christina Dye, *Drugs & Alcohol* (Phoenix, AZ: d'n Publications, 1988).

¹¹Nathan R. Williams, M.D., interview by author, Lynchburg, Virginia, 17 March 2006.

- c) Wine consumed in New Testament times averaged **three to four parts water** to one part wine,¹² and the alcohol content of the wine was about **1/8** of what it is today
- (1) People often did not have good water available; like going to Mexico
 - (2) Wine from biblical times was basically a form of **water purification**, not an unsafe liquor¹³
- d) Alcohol is treated in the Bible somewhat like slavery and polygamy, which, though not universally condemned, are indeed undermined and ultimately doomed by the high moral principles set forth in Scripture
- e) While total abstinence from wine, with its relatively low alcohol content, was not demanded in biblical times, both general biblical principles and specific Bible teachings prompt Christians today to abstain from this lethal drug
- (1) The Bible presents **total abstinence** from alcohol as the ideal
 - (a) Nazarites (Num. 6:1-4)
 - (b) Daniel (Dan. 1:8)
 - (c) John the Baptist (Luke 1:13-15)
 - (2) The Bible recognizes the dangers of alcohol
 - (a) Warns that its use promotes mockery (Prov. 20:1)
 - (b) Warns about hanging around drinkers (Prov. 23:19-20)
 - (c) Warns that its use brings woe (Prov. 23:29-33)
 - (3) The Bible condemns drunkenness
 - (a) Brings poverty (Prov. 23:21)
 - (b) No reveling (Rom. 13:13)
 - (c) Works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21)
 - (4) The Bible provides a basis for abstaining from alcohol and other drugs
 - (a) Care of the body (Rom. 12:1-2)

¹²Norman Geisler, "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139 (January-March 1982): 50.

¹³Ibid., 54.

- (b) Temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19)
- (c) No Christian's life should be an impediment to others (Rom. 14:13, 21; 1 Cor. 8:9)
- (d) Christians should always be in control of their **minds** and **actions** (1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8)

Conclusion: Illustration of removing one item from our diet which would cause cancer guarantees the arrest, avoidance, and prevention of cancer. Likewise, removing one item - alcohol - from your diet will guarantee the arrest, avoidance, and prevention of alcoholism. And the same can be said of drugs.

Drinking and drugging, then, are physical, social, economic, moral, and sinful issues. The final instruction in Solomon's warning in Proverbs 20 could not be clearer: those who use wine and other strong drink are deceived and are not wise.

We are always in danger of being deceived by those things which promise freedom, deliverance, a better life, peace, and prosperity. Without a doubt, this is the hope of many who engage in the use of alcohol and other drugs; yet, they are unwise. And in seeking to become wise through improper means, they instead become fools, according to Romans 1, and deceived into thinking they could find a better way than that which God has already provided. God wants mankind to have peace without going to pieces, and to eat and drink with joy, not jeopardy.¹⁴

To those who struggle, to those ensnared, to those who wrestle with temptation, there is hope in Christ. Let us make certain that we present ourselves to Jesus Christ as living sacrifices once for all time and strive, then, to live **unspotted** and **pure** to the glory of God.

¹⁴Ibid., 55.