

6 Things to Consider Before You Take That Next Sip of Alcohol

A few years ago, I attended a conference where pastors were encouraged to meet at a pub after the general sessions. A few of these pastors could exercise their liberty, but why publicly? I wondered how many people at the conference stumbled because of it.

The demands of life often tempt us to seek gratification in alcohol and other things. We must be on high alert. The enemy uses “opportune times” to draw us away from God. (cf. Luke 4:13.) The line is so thin that it is often hard to determine when we cross over.

The person who consumes alcohol walks a very fine line between freedom and sin, responsibility and carelessness, liberty and abuse—over-indulgence can even disqualify a person from leadership (see 1 Tim. 3). This discussion is not about a glass of wine or beer now and then, it’s about abusing liberty. Damage done to families and individuals through alcohol use demands a closer look.

Pastor John MacArthur states what many of us feel but seldom discuss, “It is puerile and irresponsible for any pastor to encourage the recreational use of intoxicants—especially in church-sponsored activities. The ravages of alcoholism and drug abuse in our culture are too well known, and no symbol of sin’s bondage is more seductive or more oppressive than booze.” I couldn’t agree more. The trend of young Christian leaders consuming alcohol on a regular basis is alarming. Many will look back and regret the damage that was done to lives, churches and their own testimony.

Pastor Darrin Patrick, in his book *Church Planter*, writes, “I

am shocked at the number of them [pastors] who are either addicted or headed toward addiction to alcohol.”

David Wilkerson adds, “Alcohol is now the modern golden calf, and millions of people, young and old, male and female, have been seduced by it.” Many counseling appointments are because of alcohol and drug abuse. Add to that the amount of domestic violence cases and the number of abused children because of alcohol, and we would be remiss to ignore its dangers.

We often flaunt liberty and laugh in the face of God’s grace by posting our favorite beer brands and wines on Facebook, all under the guise of “exercising liberty.” While Romans 14 discusses personal freedoms, it also has strong warnings “not to do anything that will cause others to fall” (vs. 21).

Consider the following:

- Jesus was filled with the Spirit. Holiness flowed from every area of His life. This cannot be said of those who consume alcohol regularly. What is the fruit of today’s preoccupation with alcohol? Conversations often turn away from God, if they were there to begin with. We begin to compromise our time and interests; we’d rather head to Vegas than a prayer meeting. Jesus said that “wisdom is justified by her children” (cf. Luke 7:35). Carnal Christians consume alcohol regularly. The harmful fruit that results from a lifestyle focused on alcohol is proof enough.
- The Bible never encourages crossing the line. A preoccupation with alcohol is just one indicator of alcoholism; a preoccupation with drinking at events or social gatherings is another. Some even bring out their private collection of hard liquor after having a few drinks. This is not liberty; it’s addiction.
- We assume that the alcohol content today is the same as in Jesus’ day. In His day, a little water was often

placed into the wine and thus decreased the alcohol content (see 1 Tim. 5:23), much like an O'Doul's today. "Strong drink" meant drinks with higher alcohol content that led to drunkenness. Ale beer, for example, often has two times more alcohol than normal beer. Those having two pints of ale may have the equivalent of five regular beers.

- "Jesus ate and drank with sinners." "But there is no suggestion in Scripture that Jesus purposely assumed the look and lifestyle of a publican in order to gain acceptance..." (John MacArthur). We should fellowship without engaging in the practices of a secular lifestyle. The world will know we are Christians by our love and by our convictions, not by how well we imitate the world around us. We seldom hear non-Christians say, "I'm turned off by Christians because they seldom compromise." But we do hear, "Christians who say one thing and do another really turn me off." "Do not be among winebibbers" (Prov. 23:20a).
- Drinking often is now called liberty instead of addiction. Many Christians center everything around alcohol—fellowship, events, birthdays, Bible studies and so on. When alcohol is the center of attention, it becomes an idol and an addiction. This is why many will be offended by this article.
- In Jesus' day, society was much more isolated. We cannot calculate how many people are affected by today's social media. A person with 500 "friends" may be encouraging dozens to stumble. It is the selfless motivation of love that keeps us from causing others to stumble (see Romans 14).

1 Peter 2:16 reminds us that many use liberty to hide sin: "A covering for evil," and Galatians 5:13 says we should not "use

[our] liberty to give an opportunity to the flesh.” If these points raise concerns, I encourage honest repentance. It’s often not if alcohol consumption causes damage, but when. Why would we willingly walk into the enemy’s camp?

God does not want us to be enslaved to anything. It is important that we take an account of our lives and see if this area has a hold on us. Be honest. How much do you drink? Is it really one drink now and then, or is it throughout the week? Is it a large goblet that holds $\frac{3}{4}$ of a bottle of wine, and do you fill it twice?

Do you make excuses in order to exceed moderation and plan activities around alcohol? Do others comment on your drinking? Do you often argue and try to justify your position? Paul said that even though we have freedom, not everything is good for us. We should not become a slave to anything (cf. 1 Cor. 6:12). It’s time to break free from this flawed liberty.