

Perry Noble's Fall Demonstrates Why Alcohol Is a Dangerous Liberty

Alcohol is a dangerous liberty. I learned this lesson the hard way, even as a Christian involved in ministry. I could have a beer or two on special occasions, but because of my past problem with alcohol as a young adult, the addiction was always ready to take hold of me again. It took an embarrassing situation, and a subsequent relapse, for me to realize that my supposed "liberty" was really an opportunity to awaken a dormant addiction.

I apologized to those I affected. I also told my wife and a few trusted friends that I could no longer exercise this liberty—it was too easy to digress beyond the boundaries of responsibility. God used this situation to reveal my blind-spots. God may use this article to speak to you as well, but we must be humble and teachable.

My heart goes out to Perry Noble and his family. All pastors are one choice away from disqualifying themselves in one way or another. No one is above the reach of Satan's grasp, including me. John Owen wrote, "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you."

The person who consumes alcohol walks a very fine line between freedom and sin, responsibility and carelessness, liberty and abuse. This discussion is not about a glass of wine or beer now and then; it's about abusing liberty.

Pastor John MacArthur states what many of us feel but seldom discuss. Pastors, take note: "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. 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." If you're in any position of leadership, please don't do this.

Consider the following:

- 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. This is not liberty— it's addiction.
- We assume that the alcohol content today is the same as in Jesus' day. Ale beer, for example, often has two or three times more alcohol than normal beer. Those having two ale beers may have the equivalent of six regular beers.
- "Jesus ate and drank with sinners." We should fellowship without engaging in the practices of a secular lifestyle. Guarding against compromise isn't just a good idea, it's absolutely necessary when it comes to preserving our testimony. "Do not be among winebibbers ..." (Prov. 23:20).
- It has been suggested that Jesus drank often. Not true. We find only purposeful incidents of Jesus having wine over the course of three years, and not very often. Today, many Christians center everything around alcohol—fellowship, events, birthdays, bible studies, etc.

- Jesus was filled with the Spirit. 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.
- 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 (Rom. 14).

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. (Luke 4:13.) The line is so thin that it is often hard to determine when we cross over.

Personally, I believe that abstinence should be practiced by most Christians, especially if they drink often and in excess (these can be signs of alcoholism). And this is especially true of leadership. The list of men and women who have lost a great deal because of alcohol is proof enough that liberty has limits. Keep these points in mind:

1. If you continue to exercise this liberty, keep it private. 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.
2. Social media influences on a broad scale. In Jesus' day, society was much more isolated—no Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc. We foster temptation by the things we post.

3. Be honest. How much do you drink? Is it really one beer or a glass of wine now and then, or is it throughout the week?
4. Do you often plan activities around alcohol (kids parties, bible studies, potlucks, etc.)?
5. Do others comment on your drinking? Do you often argue and try to justify your position? Paul said that we should not become a slave to anything (1 Cor. 6:12).

Sin is never static—it either grows or withers depending on whether we feed or starve it. Confess it to others and bring it to the light so that sin loses its power. This is one reason why I'm open about my past. If you're a pastor, let a few trusted friends know about your struggle (not necessarily those in your congregation with the exception of a trusted elder). You can contact me as well.

In closing, 1 Peter 2:16 reminds us that many use liberty to hide sin: "A covering for evil." If these points raise concerns, I encourage you to say, "Lord, I've been wrong. Remove my carnality, crush my pride, draw me closer to You. I repent of my sin and turn completely and unconditionally to you."