

Why I Never Drink Alcohol

Forty-six years ago, in 1971, the Lord graciously saved me from a life from sinful destruction, which included very serious drug abuse and some heavy drinking as well. From that day until today, I have never abused drugs again or had a sip of alcohol, other than taking Communion with a taste of wine when that was the only option.

Do I believe that the Scriptures require total abstinence for all believers? No, I do not.

Do I believe that Jesus literally turned water into wine in John 2, even if the wine was not as fermented as today? Yes, I do.

Do I believe that some Christians can drink some alcoholic beverages in moderation without sinning before God? I certainly do.

So, I am not here as anyone's judge or jury, nor am I trying to force my convictions on anyone else. I simply want to share with you why I have totally abstained from alcohol for the last 46 years, since I've often been asked this question over the years.

First, although I loved getting high on drugs and getting drunk before I was saved, I did not enjoy the taste of alcohol. Once I gave up getting drunk, I had no interest in drinking at all. There was no temptation or desire.

Things were very different for my wife Nancy, who was born again in 1974. She really enjoyed the taste of alcohol and also got drunk before she was saved. So, for her, there was no question at all that she should avoid even the taste of alcohol once she was in the Lord. Why play with fire? Drinking only had sinful connections in her life.

Second, the church in which Nancy and I came to faith practiced total abstinence, so this became our practice as well.

I honestly don't remember the pastor teaching on it in those early, formative years. Instead, we learned it from the other believers, some of whom used to be heavy drinkers before they were saved as well. For them, too, it was quite natural to cut that cord of attachment with the world.

Third, I began preaching in 1973 at the age of 18, so I was quickly looked to as a leader on some level. What kind of example was I setting? If others followed my lead, would they be helped or hurt?

For me, this was another good reason not to drink socially, since so many believers struggled with drinking before they saved, and some continued to struggle after they were saved. Why put another stumbling block before them?

Fourth, I have heard the same sad story many times over the decades, and it gives me real pause.

A former alcoholic sees another brother or sister have a glass of wine with their meal, or they visit your house and see that you have beer in your refrigerator. They then think to themselves, "Well, if it's OK for them, I guess it's OK for me," and they have one drink—just one—and quickly find themselves enslaved again, sometimes for years.

So, your liberty, which might be totally fine between you and the Lord, ends up destroying a precious brother or sister.

Paul addressed this in the context of food sacrificed to idols, but the principle is the same: "and by your knowledge [meaning, the knowledge that food itself doesn't defile us] shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? When you thus sin against the brothers, wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother

to stumble, I will never eat meat, least I cause my brother to stumble" (1 Cor. 8:11-13).

The lesson here is that we should put greater emphasis on helping weaker brothers and sisters than on enjoying our liberty.

Fifth, I minister in many different church cultures, some of which also practice total abstaining, therefore I take the more stringent road as a way of life.

For example, I've ministered in Italy and England on 40 different trips, and on my occasions, I've had meals with other Christian leaders who enjoy a glass of wine or beer with their meals.

I've never seen them drunk, nor have I felt they were doing something wrong. It's their culture, and this is between them and God. (If this seems to be in violation of my last point, it's not. I'm sharing my own counsel and convictions, not imposing them on others.)

I've also ministered in Asia on more than 40 different trips, most commonly in India, and I've never once seen a believer drink alcohol there, nor have I seen it on my few trips to Africa.

Again, for my own life, I'd rather live the same way in both cultures. In that way, if I'm ever asked about my personal practices in the stricter environment, I can say that I never drink at all.

Sixth, we are commanded in Scripture to be sober and vigilant (for example, 1 Pet. 5:8), whereas alcohol can easily lead to sluggishness, impaired judgment, sloppy thinking and acting, and outright drunkenness.

Since I believe in fleeing from that which destroys (see, for example, 2 Tim. 2:22), I run towards sobriety and away from

anything that leads to drunkenness.

Seventh, I do not want to be enslaved by any earthly habit. (For decades, I was a chocoholic. By God's grace, I've been totally free that from enslavement, along with other food addictions, for more than three years now—and I emphasize the words "by God's grace.")

It's so easy to become dependent on that one drink just to calm your nerves, that one drink just to take the edge off, that one drink to quiet your fears, that one drink.

Perhaps you're leaning on that one drink rather than on the Lord? Perhaps you're becoming dependent on it? Perhaps one drink will lead to two or three or more?

Despite the lies of the flesh and the world, sin never satisfies. Instead, it leads to more sin, then to worse sin, and then it enslaves.

Which direction is your drinking taking you? Are you now getting into alcohol in general? Are you now trying out harder and harder liquor and encouraging your friends to do the same? Are you even having some drinking parties where you glory in your "liberty"? Have you had more to drink than you planned, even getting mildly drunk?

Again, I'm not playing God here, and I'm not sitting as your judge. But if you said yes to any of these last four questions, I can almost guarantee you that you're on a slippery slope in the wrong direction and that, soon enough, your "liberty" will turn to bondage.

That's also why I have a personal problem with the whole "beer and Bible" approach to ministry.

On the one hand, I understand that churches want to meet sinners where they are and invite them to study the Word in a comfortable environment. But at what point do these sinners

hear the message of repentance, which includes repenting of drunkenness? And how many former alcoholics in the church now stumble and fall because of this environment?

To say it again, I'm only sharing my personal convictions here, and I'm quite familiar with the argument that those who have learned to drink in moderation all their lives will not struggle with getting drunk.

For many, that is true, just like in traditional Jewish culture, where small amounts of wine are incorporated into various meals and rites.

But in a country like America, where there is so much drunkenness and decadence, I'd rather err in the opposite direction and simply have nothing to do with alcohol in this world. And yes, once more, these are simply my own views, which I share because I'm often asked about drinking.

And even in biblical days, where alcoholic beverages may not have been as fermented as today and where most believers certainly did not practice total abstaining, we still have this warning: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Prov. 20:1).

The bottom line is that there are far more important things than food and drink, which is why Paul wrote, "For the kingdom of God does not mean eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

May we all pursue that "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" in a manner fitting as a kingdom of priests before our God.