

University of Valley Forge

**Stop Your Wining:
Why Alcohol Abstinence is the
Best Choice for Christians in the United States**

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Introduction

The debate on alcohol consumption is not a new one to Christianity. The Scriptures repeatedly reference alcohol use at various levels; however, this issue is once again coming to the forefront of discussion within churches in the United States. On one side are those who believe it is acceptable to consume alcoholic beverages in moderation, and on the other are those who hold to a position of abstinence from all such beverages as a standard to be maintained. In an article written by Joel Engle on this subject, he writes about his experience growing up in church, “Abstinence was just about THE litmus test for sanctification!”¹ Certainly, not all Christians or churches in the country held to such a standard, but alcohol abstinence was a recognizable trait throughout most of Christianity in the United States. But this is no longer the case. Engle makes the observation that, “most pastors now advocate drinking in moderation.”² One must question if this is a response of obedience to biblical teaching, or is it nothing more than succumbing to the pressures of a society where alcohol consumption has been glamorized mixed with the erosion of Christian values?

It was not that many decades ago when the clergy was responsible to hold the lines of teaching people the ways of living a godly life, even though there would have been some within their congregations that would have chosen to go a different way. Today, denominational leadership and clergy are not only turning a blind eye to the matter but

¹ Joel Engle. “Is It Wrong For A Christian To Have A Drink Of Alcohol?” *Crosswalk.com*, (March 23, 2015). <https://www.crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/is-it-wrong-for-christian-have-drink-alcohol.html> (accessed January 27, 2019).

² Ibid.

are openly endorsing it. This has led to not just a Christian drinking a glass of wine in their own home or a restaurant, but churches brewing their own versions of beer and using it as an invitation for the community to come. Considering the issues facing our society, one must wonder if this is an appropriate avenue of outreach that the Christian church should be engaged in?

The Scriptures are not silent about this issue. God has much to say about what happens to those who involve themselves with wine. For those who align themselves with the moderation position, they point to Bible verses such as Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11), or Paul telling Timothy he should drink a little wine for his stomach (1 Timothy 5:23). One cannot simply pass these verses off or twist them to say what they do not say, but do we have a right understanding of such passages? If one points to such passages believing it gives them approval for moderation, what do they do with the verses that warn and outrightly prohibit the drinking of wine and strong drink? “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1 NASB). And what about other Scriptures that do not mention wine specifically, but require the followers of Christ to be more concerned about how their lives impact others than fulfilling their own desires? If we are going to come to a sense of what is truly honoring to God, we must weigh the matter out through the filter of God’s Word and not solely on our desires or preferences.

Aside from biblical positions, there is also the health and social effects to be considered. Some would point out the various studies that show there may be some health benefits to people who drink in moderation, but at what cost to other areas of life. The United States has become a culture that is given to indulgence and excess in multiple

areas of life. As people, we have shown that we do not always do well when it comes to areas of self-control. One need only check out the many videos publicly posted on YouTube concerning human behavior when influenced by alcohol to see that. While the church may wrestle with this issue, society seemingly has no such concern, but is that truly the case? When one considers the cost effect of alcoholism on our society, both in terms of relationships and financial loss, it rises into the millions of dollars and devastation within the family unit. In light of this, one would be hard pressed to explain how it is better to drink alcohol than abstain from it. Of course, there is no debate when it comes to the sinfulness of drunkenness. There is personal injury, crime, loss of income, and cause of death that result from the usage of alcohol. Even though the focus may be at the point of moderation, how well is that term defined? This is important because we already know we do not do well at monitoring ourselves.

In the United States, the consumption of alcohol is legalized, and its usage is even encouraged through movies, television programs, and commercial advertisements; however, there are secular organizations in our society that do point out the dangers of drinking. Health organizations consistently make the recommendation that people who do not currently drink alcohol should not start. Over the years, the legal level of blood alcohol content for drivers of motor vehicles has experienced a movement to be lowered in most states, and not raised. This is the result of real-world experience in understanding the impairment that alcohol usage brings. Legal authorities point out that alcohol impairment begins with the very first drink. Yet within the Christian church, there is a move toward allowance instead of abstinence.

The doctrinal position of many mainline denominations such as Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, United Methodist, and Presbyterian are either already accepting or moving toward an acceptance of the moderation position. Unfortunately, none provide a clear understanding of how biblical moderation should be defined. Is it one drink? Is it drink freely as long as you are not drunk? Is it acceptable to drink only in the privacy of your home, or is regularly drinking at the local bar acceptable? If the church does not provide such definition are they simply allowing people to do what is right in their own eyes on this topic? If guidelines are not provided, people will tend toward excess, even among the clergy. This would mean that even those people who sincerely want to honor God with their lives may not realize they are moving in the opposite direction and falling into sin.

It is a Christian's responsibility to live his or her life in a manner that brings the greatest glory to God. This includes even the most basic activities in life. "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). To bring glory to God means that people must make decisions throughout their daily lives in a manner that is pleasing to God, even if it requires the self-sacrifice of the individual to accomplish this. This requires a believer to live by godly principles in understanding God's ways that may not be spelled out with specificity. When Paul writes to the Corinthian church that he will adjust his life in any way necessary to keep another believer in Christ from stumbling (1 Cor 8:13), he is speaking of a spiritual principle. One that considers the needs of others to be more important than his own. The fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ will not allow the freedom he or she has in Christ to be used selfishly as a covering for doing wrong (1 Pet 2:16).

A denomination's position on this issue carries significant ramifications. It affects practice and polity within the organization, and even more significantly, can impact the quality of a Christian's personal relationship with the Living God. This dynamic should be one of the most concerning in looking at this issue. If a denomination holds to a stance of moderation, will they be held accountable if such a teaching is not Scriptural? If a pastor publicly proclaims it is acceptable for a Christian to drink alcohol, do they share responsibility for an attendee or member who falls into drunkenness, or even worse, addiction? Is God's definition of drunkenness and moderation the same as humanity's? These are questions that deserve serious examination considering the impact on lives, both on earth and for eternity. As Rev. Barry Cameron puts it, "The bottom line is this: The question really is not *CAN A CHRISTIAN DRINK?* Rather, it is: *SHOULD A CHRISTIAN DRINK?*"³ While it is difficult, if not impossible, to prove the Bible unequivocally bans the consumption of fermented wine, based upon deduction of biblical teachings and sociological and medical reasonings, alcohol abstinence is the best choice for the Christian who lives in the United States.

There is a plethora of scholastic research from around the world that has already been done relating to this topic. The following will look at some of that research, biblical passages and the positions that are commonly held. This paper is meant to be thorough, but not exhaustive in its contents. There are still further questions that will need to be answered, and sound research will continue to provide the necessary information. This thesis will focus primarily on the American Christian, and while it may have applicable

³ Barry Cameron. "Can A Christian Drink Alcohol?." *ChurchLeaders.com*, (January 26, 2017). <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/298190-can-christian-drink-alcohol.html/2> (accessed April 6, 2019).

implications to Christian believers around the world, that would be beyond the intended scope of this paper.

Chapter 1

What Say the Scriptures?

For the Christian, all matters of faith, doctrine, and practice must pass through the filter of the Bible. God's Word must be authoritative in the life of anyone who desires to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when it comes to this question of "should a Christian drink alcohol?" humanity's opinions must take a back seat to what God has to say on the subject. The problem that is faced here is that God does not give a clear mandate. It would be far less subjective if one could simply point to chapter and verse reading, "Thou shall not drink any alcohol." Since no such all-encompassing verse exists, one must engage in hermeneutic methodology. Such tools can provide deeper understanding by utilizing word studies, the author's word usage, other biblical verses on the topic, the context of such usage, and gaining historical perspective relative to the culture of the day. However, even employing such tools does not always result in black and white results, as we shall see. (All Scripture references will be from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise stated.)

Wine Etymology

Language forms the basis of human communication and understanding, and words form the basis of language. One of the challenges that is inherent to translation from one language to the next is an accurate understanding of the word in its original language and time and then determining a logical utilization of the word in the target language that best correlates to the original intent. In the current American culture, the

word *wine* is typically defined and commonly understood as a fermented drink. Adhering to this narrow definition carries a significant impact when it comes to the average person's understanding when reading this word in the Scriptures. Every time the word *wine* is read, the concept that comes to mind is that all uses of that word in the Bible must refer to the fermented beverage since that is how we understand that word today.

However, some would be surprised to learn that even within the English language the word *wine* has had a broader definition. In Noah Webster's first published dictionary, he defines *wine* as simply "the juice of certain fruits."⁴ One must recognize within any given language, words may carry multiple definitions, and definitions changing over time is not an unusual occurrence. For example, fifty years ago if someone used the word *ram* one would believe it was in reference to an animal, or perhaps the striking action that animal was known for. Today when *ram* is used in conversation it may well be a reference to a truck or the amount of memory used in a computer. Although when computers do not function properly the striking action of the animal may also come to mind as frustration sets in. Since this is the case with the relatively current English language, the challenge is magnified when translating a foreign language that is also centuries old. In the case of *wine*, Webster's dual definition may more adequately reflect the understanding of translated words in the original Hebrew text.

According to Strong's Concordance (Strong's numbers provided), there are several Hebrew words that are translated as *wine*, but for the purpose of this paper, this

⁴ Noah Webster. "American Dictionary of the English Language," *WebstersDictionary1828.com*, (1828). <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/wine> (accessed April 6, 2019).

author will look at three of the most recognized. The most common Hebrew word used for wine is *yayin* (3196).⁵ Based on the passages in which it is used, it can mean both fermented and unfermented wine. Depending on where one falls in the alcohol abstinence argument can certainly sway one's opinion. Some want to argue the point that the Bible condemns all drinking of alcohol and this word must mean only grape juice. Others argue that *yayin* being translated as wine must always mean it was fermented.

Wine is the fermented juice of crushed grapes; an alcoholic beverage that can lead to intoxication if consumed in excess. Most of us know what wine is, though some teachers have attempted to explain that the wine in Scripture is sometimes wine, and sometimes grape juice. The plain truth is the best biblical scholars argue consistently and clearly, that not only is the "wine" of the Bible alcoholic, maintaining unfermented grape juice would be a virtual impossibility.⁶

Thorn's position is more in line with the mindset of the contemporary cultural definition of wine but does not take into account the broader, more historical understanding of the word.

For example, in Genesis, we find the first occurrence of this word in the Bible following the flood and Noah's subsequent farming of the land which included a vineyard. "He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent" (Genesis 9:21). Clearly, we can conclude that *yayin*, as used in this context, identifies a fermented beverage made from the juice of grapes. God issues no command here as it relates to drinking alcohol, but the passage certainly reveals there are grave consequences when drinking wine to the point of drunkenness.

⁵ James Strong, LL.D, S.T.D. *Expanded Edition Strong's Complete Word Study Concordance* (Chatanooga, TN: AMG Publishers), 1873.

⁶ Joe Thorn. "A Theology Of Wine," *Doctrine And Devotion* (February 15, 2017). <http://www.doctrineanddevotion.com/blog/wine> (accessed February 5, 2019).

In Isaiah 16:10 we find an example of how *yayin* is used in reference to the unfermented juice of the grape. “Gladness and joy are taken away from the fruitful field; in the vineyards also there will be no cries of joy or jubilant shouting, no treader treads out wine in the presses, for I have made the shouting to cease.” Since the process of treading out the grapes is the initial crushing of the fruit to release its juice, and since it would take several days for the fermentation process to begin, it is clear that this must speak of the unfermented juice in this usage of the Hebrew word.

A second Hebrew word found in the Old Testament is *tiyrosh* (8492).⁷ The usage of this word appears to always be used as identifying the juice of the grape before the fermentation process begins (i.e. new wine, sweet wine). “Threshing floor and wine press will not feed them, and the new wine will fail them. They will not pour out drink offerings of wine to the Lord” (Hos 9:2, 4). In this passage, the word *tiyrosh* is used in both verses. In the first occurrence, we can see the word *new* is inserted by the translators to add further information, but it is not employed in the second occurrence. The practice of inserting *new* seems to be a more common practice in the more modern Bible translations such as the New American Standard Version, the New International Version, the New King James Version, and even Young’s Literal Translation, but even then, is not consistent in every case. In the older King James Version of the Bible, the translators did not make such a distinction and simply used the word *wine*. This gives further credence to the need for better understanding through word studies when dealing with biblical issues being applied to the current cultural context.

⁷ James Strong, LL.D, S.T.D. *Expanded Edition Strong’s Complete Word Study Concordance* (Chatanooga, TN: AMG Publishers), 1999.

A third Hebrew word is *shekar* (7941),⁸ and it consistently identifies a high alcoholic beverage or strong liquor. “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise (Prov 20:1). This word is always associated with some type of alcoholic drink. There are no usages where one could confuse it with the drinking of wine since the word usage does not lend itself to that. There is one Old Testament verse where *shekar* is commanded to be poured out as an offering to the Lord. “Then the drink offering with it shall be a fourth of a hin for each lamb, in the holy place you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the Lord” (Num 28:7). But one must be careful not to think this is God’s approval of its use for human consumption, even in moderation, for there were some aspects of offerings that were reserved solely for God’s pleasure. One need only look at the recipe and commands related to usage of incense in the Holy Place to understand that. Nadab and Abihu learned that one must never take the holiness of God for granted (Lev 10).

In the New Testament, the primary Greek word used for wine is *oinos* (3631).⁹ It is also the primary word used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (Septuagint or LXX). As such, it is used in verses that speak of both fermented and unfermented wine and is also used in reference to the wrath of God. “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). Paul’s usage of this example points clearly that the wine he is speaking of here is fermented. Otherwise, there would be no danger of being drunk. In another passage we have the

⁸ Ibid., 1985.

⁹ Ibid., 2121.

words of Jesus, “No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins” (Mark 2:22). In both passages, there is clear usage that distinguishes one wine as fermented and the other as unfermented. The result then shows there are passages where the alcoholic nature of the beverage cannot be determined by word usage alone but must be understood in the context of the account, or from other passages that provide depth of understanding. Lemke says it like this, “When we encounter difficult texts, we should interpret them in the light of clearer texts. When we interpret Scripture by Scripture, we are more likely to come to an understanding of the truth.”¹⁰ Let us now turn our attention to examining some of the New Testament passages.

Typical Passages

There are typically two major passages that are referenced when it comes to the issue of Christians drinking wine. The first involves the miracle at the wedding in Cana where Jesus turned water into wine.

Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” So they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, “Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.” So they took it to him. When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now” (John 2:7-11).

¹⁰ Steve W. Lemke. “Good Hermeneutics: Rightly Dividing the Word of God,” *Apologetics Resource Center* (July 29, 2015). <https://arcapologetics.org/objections/good-hermeneutics/> (accessed April 6, 2019).

As was stated earlier, the Greek word translated as *wine* here (*oinos*) does not denote alcoholic content within the word itself, so one must look to the context in which the word is found for help. In this passage there can be no doubt that Jesus made wine, but at issue is whether or not the wine was fermented? There are those who would say that it must have been fermented because it says Jesus made wine, and one must conclude that all wine is fermented, or it is not wine. “The only logical conclusion is that whenever the New Testament refers to 'wine' (it does not do so very much), it refers to normally fermented wine.”¹¹ This is the prevailing perspective of many Christians, including pastors and church leaders, in the American church where the culture is moving toward acceptance of drinking alcoholic beverages. However, as has already been shown, the definition and usage of words change over time, and one must not assume that the usage of the word *wine* today carries the same meaning as it did centuries ago.

One of the issues to be considered is the reason for the need of the miracle in the first place. The setting is a Jewish wedding, a celebration that has long been underway, to the point that they have run out of wine. At this point it should be noted that one must avoid the tendency is to interpret such events through the lens of current culture. The wedding customs of our current day society should not be superimposed upon the customs of first century Israel. The wine spoken of in the account of this biblical text can lead to two possibilities.

¹¹ Robin A. Brace. “Surely Jesus Did Not Drink Real Wine?,” *UK Apologetics* (February 7, 2012). <http://www.ukapologetics.net/12/oinos.htm> (accessed February 8, 2019).

The first possibility is to consider the wine at the wedding in Cana could have been unfermented. To some it may seem ludicrous to think of a wedding celebration without alcoholic beverages; however, such celebrations do exist for various reasons. In our culture today, there are products available such as sparkling apple cider, sparkling grape juice, and even non-alcoholic beer. If the wedding in Cana was stocked with unfermented grape juice (*oinos*), then it would make sense that the wine (*oinos*) Jesus made would have been unfermented as well. One could surmise that phrase the guests had “drunk freely” simply means they drank all that was originally provided but were not drunk.

The second possibility would be to consider that the wine provided at the wedding was fermented and that the corresponding phrase the guests had “drunk freely” had resulted in various levels of intoxication. The wording of the head waiter could be viewed by some as questioning the motivation of the groom as trying to pull off some type of ruse on his guests by getting them drunk first so they do not notice the cheap booze coming out later. The context of this scenario then begs the question of whether or not Jesus would have made fermented wine to enable those who were already drunk to continue and deepen that condition? Would this not go against the very character of God who has already condemned drunkenness as a sin to then provide the very means for these people to continue in that condition? Could Jesus have simply created new wine (*oinos*) that was of such quality and flavor that it simply exceeded the expectations of those who drank it? The text by itself does not supply enough evidence to say one way or the other but does require one to consider the character and consistency of God. These are important questions deserving further research and consideration.

The second passage that proponents of drinking alcoholic beverages involves the advice of the Apostle Paul given to a young pastor by the name of Timothy. Paul has regularly written warnings against drunkenness as a sin, but now advises Timothy to drink some wine for medicinal purposes. “No longer drink water exclusively but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Tim 5:23). The use of wine and liquor for medicinal purposes has long been the fodder of jokes, but there is no mistaking that wine has historically served useful as a medicine. “A team of researchers in the US has discovered traces of a medicinal alcoholic drink in bottles that are more than 5,000 years old.”¹² Even some medicines today, such as Nyquil, contain a percentage of alcohol. Hippocrates was a Greek physician who lived some four hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ (460-375 BCE) and is often referred to as the father of modern medicine.¹³ One of the accomplishments with which he is credited is cataloging medicines, including the uses of wine in its various forms and strengths for treatments of illnesses and conditions.¹⁴ It should be noted that Paul spent a significant amount of time with a physician who would have certainly been aware of various medical techniques and treatments in his day. Perhaps he had even experienced firsthand treatment from Luke in dealing with stomach issues that Timothy was dealing with. As a

¹² Victoria Gill. “Ancient Medicines Were Alcoholic.” *BBC News* (April 14, 2009). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7992575.stm> (accessed April 6, 2019).

¹³ Wesley D. Smith. “Hippocrates.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hippocrates#ref3220> (accessed February 11, 2019).

¹⁴ Steven Rourke. “Drink Up! Alcohol As Medicine Through History.” *Medscape* (March 14, 2017). <https://www.medscape.com/features/slideshow/alcohol-medicine> (accessed February 11, 2019).

result, this passage cannot be used as a proof text for those who are proponents of drinking in moderation as much as those who would uphold its medicinal use. Let us consider two aspects of this verse.

First, the fact that Paul had to tell Timothy to drink wine for his stomach ailment would lead one to conclude that Timothy must have practiced abstinence as his Christian lifestyle. This should not be surprising since the early church would have been exposed to the dangers of excessive alcohol usage. Timothy must have looked at the culture in which he lived and preached the Gospel and concluded that abstinence was the best decision for him. The text does not give any specifics that went into Timothy's choice, but inferences can be made that required Paul to offer such advice to him. Perhaps it was Timothy's desire that no one would look down on him and to live a life above reproach (1 Tim 5:12). Perhaps it was how he served as an example to those who would desire to enter into leadership within the church (1 Tim 3:2). Perhaps it is how he knew to live a life of good conscience (1 Tim 1:5, 19). The second aspect is that Paul's admonition was to use wine in a medicinal amount ("a little wine"). While the text does not state what dosage measurement that would be, in consideration of Timothy's position of abstinence, it would be most unlikely that Paul was recommending Timothy to begin drinking in moderation as an ongoing lifestyle change.

Additional Considerations

There are many verses in the Bible that address the drinking of alcohol, some in a positive light and others as dire warnings against it. This section will only look at a sampling of those verses and is not meant to be exhaustive.

It has already been stated in this paper that God views drunkenness as sinful, but for the sake of establishing biblical continuity, here are a few specific verses that directly address the issue.

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Peter writes this passage delineating that there is to be a marked difference in how a believer is to live now compared to those who do not believe (Gentiles). Paul carries the same theme. “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy” (Rom 13:13). In this verse, Paul clearly links drunkenness with other sinful practices that are to be avoided in life, especially for those who claim to be followers of Jesus. In Paul’s letter to the believers in the city of Ephesus, he writes, “...do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). Another clear example of how God expects His followers to live at a different standard than people who do not know Him. In the mid-1700’s Rev. George Whitefield is credited with bringing revival to North America known as the *Great Awakening*. He challenged people to leave their sinful ways and return to God. In his sermon, *The Heinous Sin of Drunkenness*, he expounds upon Ephesians 5:18 as his text.

But alas, Christians! I mean Christians falsely so called, are led captive by all sin in general, and by this or drunkenness in particular; that was St. Paul to rise again from the dead, he might be tempted to think most of us were turned back to the worship of dumb idols...and made it part of our religion, as the Ephesians did of theirs, "to be drunk with wine, wherein is excess."¹⁵

¹⁵ George Whitefield. “The Heinous Sin of Drunkenness.” <http://www.biblebb.com/files/whitefield/gw052.htm> (accessed February 11, 2019).

As a result of these and other Scriptures that specifically address drunkenness, no credible or serious scholar of the Scriptures can conclude anything other than God is adamantly opposed to drunkenness. Since the issue being debated today is dealing more along the lines of moderation and abstinence, it is incumbent to look at more biblical passages that require consideration.

Solomon is known as the wisest man who ever lived, and out of that God-given wisdom, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write the book of Ecclesiastes. “Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works” (9:7). Some read this and immediately take this as a mandate to eat and drink without limitation; however, the context of the passage suggests that this may be more of a sarcastic commentary on life. In this chapter, Solomon is speaking of the futility of life, that regardless of how a person lives he or she will still taste death. Not necessarily a good verse to pull out and use as a proof text.

Proverbs 31 is most recognized for describing the qualities of a good wife, but there is also a verse in that chapter that relates to alcohol. “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more.” (6-7). From this passage, one could conclude that there are times when alcoholic beverages can be used. Basically, when someone is at the end of life or has lost all hope. When Jesus was giving His life on the cross, He was given a wine that was mixed with gall, but He refused to drink it (Matt 27:33-34). Keeping in context, it should be noted that immediately preceding the Proverbs 31 passage these words are also written. “It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink, for they will drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the

afflicted (4-5). It would appear the advice of warning is stronger than the giving of permission when it comes to alcohol usage.

In the Scripture, there are far more verses that warn against drinking wine and strong drink than those that appear supportive of it. In Leviticus God gives a clear command that the priests were not to drink any wine before coming into His presence to serve Him or before they were to teach the people. The Lord then spoke to Aaron, saying:

Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations— and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses (Lev 10:8-11).

There is no doubt that God requires those who enter His presence to have clean hearts and clear heads. This command was to be perpetual throughout the generations of the priestly line. In the aforementioned passage from Proverbs 31:4 “It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink.” Such verses may be pertinent to people in the church age when coupled with what Peter writes in 1 Peter: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (2:9). This should cause one to consider that the issue of abstaining from drinking wine is not solely reserved for the pastor of the church but may apply to every believer in Jesus Christ who has been established as a member of the royal priesthood. Christians have been called out, sanctified, set apart for a role in God’s kingdom. “He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever” (Rev 1:6).

One of the more debated issues of fermented wine versus unfermented wine usage is centered around the Christian practice of Holy Communion. “And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes’” (Luke 22:17-18). Jesus Christ instituted the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup as a perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice He was about to make to atone for the sins of mankind. It was by no mistake or coincidence that this event ran alongside the long-observed Passover meal. Luke’s Gospel records for us the words of Jesus that bear witness to that fact (Luke 22:8, 15). Jesus speaks of drinking *the fruit of the vine*. There are several types of fruit that grow on vines; watermelons, cantaloupes, and tomatoes to name a few, but in this occurrence, it is clear that this phrase is speaking of grapes.¹⁶ At issue is whether or not the wine that was used in the Passover meal was fermented or not.

The Communion wine question was part of a wider debate concerning the scriptural implications of abstinence. Traditionalists pointed to frequent biblical wine drinking. Teetotalers answered that: (1) both fermented and unfermented wines were described in the Bible; (2) Scripture praised teetotalers, such as the disciple Timothy; and (3) not all Christian reforms were specified in the Bible.¹⁷

This issue of abstinence versus moderation has been debated in Christianity for a long time and will continue to be. The reason for this is due to the lack of clear Scriptural evidence to give either side the final authoritative victory.

¹⁶ Kyle Butt. “What is the ‘Fruit of the Vine?’” *Apologetic Press* (2008). <https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1262> (accessed February 12, 2019).

¹⁷ Belaskie, Cynthia. "Bible Wine." In *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopedia*, edited by Jack S. Blocker, David M. Fahey, and Ian R. Tyrrell. ABC-CLIO, 2003. https://search-credoreference-com.dbs.valleyforge.edu/content/entry/abcalc/bible_wine/0?institutionId=5111 (accessed February 15, 2019).

The first Passover took place as part of the final plague that God brought upon the land of Egypt to deliver the Israelites out of slavery. God gives Moses specific instructions on how this meal was to be put together and eaten. Considering the consequences for those who did not obey would be the death of the firstborn, one would believe that the Israelites took no chance of neglecting even the smallest detail. The account is recorded in the book of Exodus, and God tells them specifically how to choose and prepare the lamb; how to place the blood of the lamb upon the doorposts of the house, and that all leaven was to be removed from the dwelling (Exodus 12). This is where some would argue that if wine was consumed, it could not be fermented since the fermentation process requires the presence of yeast.¹⁸ However, Rabbi Dovid Zakikowski believes there is no prohibition against fermented wine as a part of the Seder since it is not a yeast that comes from grain which would come under the category of leavened food.¹⁹ However, one must be careful not to superimpose modern day practices or opinions on what God says or does not say in His Word. It should be noted that in God's initial instructions for observing the Passover meal, He gives no instruction concerning what beverage is to be consumed. There is no mention of the consumption of water, wine or grape juice, but one should conclude that some type of beverage was used. One can only conclude that the ceremony changed over the years, and the *fruit of the vine* became

¹⁸ Jerry C. Ray. "Fruit of the Vine: Fermented or Unfermented?" *TruthMagazine* (April 1966). <http://truthmagazine.com/archives/volume10/TM010158.html> (accessed February 15, 2019).

¹⁹ Dovid Zaklikowski. "Why is it permitted to drink wine on Passover when it is fermented with yeast?" *Chabad.org*. https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/508672/jewish/Why-is-it-permitted-to-drink-wine-on-Passover-when-it-is-fermented-with-yeast.htm (accessed February 15, 2019).

an accepted part of the observance by the time Jesus celebrated it with His disciples. However, one cannot argue with certainty for or against the cup Jesus used as either fermented or unfermented. “It is impossible to prove conclusively that Jesus used fermented wine. It was generally the custom of the Jews, but there were exceptions. No man can prove that every Jew observing the Passover had to use fermented wine or that Jesus used fermented wine or that the New Testament demands fermented wine.”²⁰ It is possible that fermented wine was used in the early church at the observance of the Lord’s Table especially since Paul had to bring correction to the church in Corinth for abusing the opportunity by becoming drunk (1 Cor 11:17-22). The fact that Jesus drank the *fruit of the vine* at the Passover, even if fermented, does not give credence to the practice of drinking alcohol in moderation since the observance of the Passover meal would have been done only on an annual basis. One author points to the words of the first-century historian, Josephus, who refers to freshly squeezed grape juice as the *fruit of the vine*²¹ as an example of those who believe it was unfermented juice. “Either grape juice or fermented wine fulfills, or is encompassed in, the scriptural authority of ‘fruit of the vine.’”²² It is a challenge to prove the position of alcohol abstinence based solely on

²⁰ Jerry C. Ray. “Fruit of the Vine: Fermented or Unfermented?” *TruthMagazine* (April 1966). <http://truthmagazine.com/archives/volume10/TM010158.html> (accessed February 15, 2019).

²¹ Samuele Bacchiocchi. *Wine In The Bible: A Biblical Study On The Use Of Alcoholic Beverages*. Biblical Perspectives (1989): 32.

²² Jerry C. Ray. “Fruit of the Vine: Fermented or Unfermented?” *TruthMagazine* (April 1966). <http://truthmagazine.com/archives/volume10/TM010158.html> (accessed February 15, 2019).

specific passages of Scripture, so it is incumbent to examine other avenues of information and deduce spiritual principles from a further look into the Scriptures.

Chapter 2

Alcohol in American Society

In the current twenty-first century culture of the United States, we are far removed from the days of the Temperance Movement and Prohibition. In the early nineteenth century, there was a religious revival that swept across the nation known as the Second Great Awakening during which evangelistic outreaches brought thousands of people to a deeper devotion to God. One of the most noted men of that era was Charles Finney.²³ Charles Finney employed an effective style of Holy Spirit empowered preaching with emotion to move multitudes of people. He utilized altar calls and encouraged people to respond with public decisions to follow Christ.²⁴ His most effective campaign was centered in Rochester, New York. “The Rochester campaign also united Christians around two significant social issues — temperance and the abolition of slavery. Both were to have far-reaching implications.”²⁵ This revival led to not only personal decisions for Christ but also resulted in unified movements of public reformation. “Maine passed the first state prohibition law in 1846, and a number of other states had followed suit by the time the Civil War began in 1861.”²⁶ One should be aware of how such significant

²³ William P. Farley. “Charles Finney: The Controversial Evangelist.” *Enrichment Journal*. http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200601/200601_118_Finney.cfm (accessed March 1, 2019).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Prohibition.” *History.com* (October 29, 2009). <https://www.history.com/topics/roaring-twenties/prohibition> (accessed March 1, 2019).

events that make up a part of our country's history had their roots in the movement of people trying to live out their faith as they believed it taught in the Bible. The roots of the Prohibition movement continued to grow, and local temperance societies became common in communities across the United States with women take the lead. "Women played a strong role in the temperance movement, as alcohol was seen as a destructive force in families and marriages."²⁷ As daughters, wives, and mothers, women would have had a personal interest in seeing alcohol removed as an evil influence on the men who were a part of their lives. People coming to a personal faith in Jesus Christ resulted in a movement toward social reform. "At the heart of this aspect of the Second Great Awakening was a religious commitment to social reform...Motivated by a concept of religious benevolence that encouraged them to try and improve the condition of spiritually impoverished people."²⁸ In 1919 the Prohibition Amendment was ratified and was the law of the land from 1920 until it was overturned in 1933. While it was not without controversy, gave rise to criminal enterprises and was hard to enforce, it does reveal a period in our nation's history where alcohol was not only viewed as a negative influence but was illegal to purchase.

Today it is evident to anyone who watches television, goes to movies or attends sporting events that we are an alcohol drinking society. Alcoholic beverages are in use by all ages from youth to the elderly. Alcohol consumption is promoted through numerous advertising campaigns and glorified by famous personalities. A research study was

²⁷ "Prohibition." *History.com* (October 29, 2009).
<https://www.history.com/topics/roaring-twenties/prohibition> (accessed March 1, 2019).

²⁸ "Institutionalizing Religious Belief: The Benevolent Empire." *U.S. History.org*.
<http://www.ushistory.org/us/22d.asp> (accessed March 1, 2019).

conducted in 2009 that revealed, for the first time, a direct correlation between alcoholic advertisements and movie scenes directly increasing the amount of alcohol consumption. "Our study clearly shows that alcohol portrayals in films and advertisements not only affects people's attitudes and norms on drinking in society, but it might work as a cue that affects craving and subsequent drinking in people who are drinkers."²⁹ Drinking for many in our culture has become a right of passage to adulthood, synonymous with having a good time or achieving some level of social status. If one were to judge our culture based on the media influence alone, those who practice alcohol abstinence must be the most miserable in our society, but such is not the case.

Health Effects

There is an abundance of scientific information available that addresses the health effects of drinking alcohol on the human body. Some of the information reveals there are some positives aspects if it is consumed in moderation. However, there are far more information sources that address the warnings and dangers associated with alcohol consumption that far outweigh any of the benefits.

One of the supports used by those in favor of moderate alcohol consumption focus on the possible health benefits. There have been studies done that show the alcohol and antioxidants in red wine may be beneficial to the heart. "Wine, and especially red wine, has been studied extensively. Evidence suggests that moderate consumption may help people live longer, protect against certain cancers, improve mental health, and

²⁹ Oxford University Press. "Alcohol On TV Makes People Drink More." *ScienceDaily* (March 5, 2009). www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/03/090303193958.htm (accessed March 1, 2019).

enhance heart health.”³⁰ It may also have a positive effect on diabetes, cholesterol, and even cancer.³¹ The staff of the Mayo Clinic has produced an article outlining possible benefits and some recommendations. “Red wine, in moderation, has long been thought of as heart healthy. The alcohol and certain substances in red wine called antioxidants may help prevent heart disease by increasing levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol (the "good" cholesterol) and protecting against artery damage.”³² Red wine has a higher concentration of an antioxidant called resveratrol that can indeed be beneficial to the human heart. Resveratrol is naturally produced in some plants as a defense against bacteria, fungi, and to protect against ultraviolet light.³³ It is found in the skins of red grapes, blueberries, cranberries, and peanuts; however, the highest concentration is found in red grapes. To receive the highest dosages of resveratrol in its natural form it is recommended to eat grapes and berries raw.³⁴ A study has only been performed on mice, and a person would have to drink 1,000 liters of red wine to get the

³⁰ Yvette Brazier. “Is Red Wine Good For You?” *Medical News Today* (September 7, 2017). <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/265635.php> (accessed March 1, 2019).

³¹ “Resveratrol Supplements.” *WebMD*. <https://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/resveratrol-supplements> (accessed March 1, 2019).

³² Mayo Clinic Staff, “Red Wine and Resveratrol: Good for your heart?,” *Heart Disease* (November 12, 2016). <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/red-wine/ART-20048281?pg=1> (accessed March 1, 2019).

³³ Yvette Brazier. “Is Red Wine Good For You?” *Medical News Today* (September 7, 2017). <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/265635.php> (accessed March 1, 2019).

³⁴ Sara Ipatenco. “What Foods Have Resveratrol?” *The Nest*. <https://woman.thenest.com/foods-resveratrol-4679.html> (accessed March 1, 2019).

amount of resveratrol used in the study.³⁵ At that point, the health dangers would far outweigh any potential benefits. Some manufacturers have decided to capitalize on this compound by producing and selling it in capsule form, but even in this form the amount needed to be beneficial would be 2,000 milligrams. Supplements are produced containing 250 to 500 milligrams.³⁶

While red wine is touted as having a possible health benefit, what about other forms of alcohol? Other forms of alcohol that are popular for drinking include white wine, champagne, and beer. In a study performed with three white wines, there was only one that carried some of the beneficial properties associated with red wine but only in fractional amounts. The other two test samples provided no measurable benefit. Champagne was found to have more benefits than white wine, but as mentioned earlier, the levels of consumption for these alcoholic beverages would have to be so high that it would most likely result in further health issues.³⁷

Globally, beer is the most consumed alcoholic beverage outpacing all other forms of alcohol combined.³⁸ In the United States, beer is marketed through all forms of media,

³⁵ Mayo Clinic Staff, “Red Wine and Resveratrol: Good for your heart?,” *Heart Disease* (November 12, 2016). <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/red-wine/ART-20048281?pg=1> (accessed March 1, 2019).

³⁶ “Resveratrol Supplements.” *WebMD*. <https://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/resveratrol-supplements> (accessed March 1, 2019).

³⁷ Chris Regal, ed. “The Health Benefits of White Wine and Champagne.” *HealthCentral* (May 31, 2013). <https://www.healthcentral.com/article/the-health-benefits-of-white-wine-and-champagne> (accessed March 1, 2019).

³⁸ Thomas Pellechia. “Global Alcohol Consumption Up In 2017, But U.S. 2018 Wine Exports Uncertain.” *Forbes* (June 11, 2008). <https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomaspellechia/2018/06/11/global-alcohol-consumption-up-in-2017-u-s-2018-wine-exports-uncertain/#37f0aa8b314a> (accessed March 4, 2019).

and sales amounted to over \$37 billion as reported in 2017.³⁹ Drinkers of beer like to also tout the health benefits of their beverage of choice in comparison to wine. “Wine usually gets all the credit as the booze that helps cut back your cardiovascular disease risk, but beer may be just as heart-healthy of a beverage.”⁴⁰ Consumption benefits include increased cardiovascular health, lower risk of diabetes and kidney stones, and improved self-image.⁴¹ Of course, improved self-image may be more a reflection of the judgmental impairment of alcohol on the human brain. Even with possible health benefits of drinking wine and beer, one must consider whether the motivation for drinking such beverages is purely health-oriented when there are supplements and other sources to provide similar benefits without the associated dangers of over-usage of alcohol. Even in the studies that show such benefits, the benefits quickly diminish when alcohol usage rises above the one or two drink threshold that is recommended.⁴² As a result, the argument of needing to drink wine or beer for heart health, or any other, is not a very strong one. “Neither the American Heart Association nor the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute recommends that a person starts drinking alcohol just to prevent heart disease. Alcohol

³⁹ “The State Of The U.S. Beer Market.” *Nielsen* (May 15, 2017). <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2017/the-state-of-the-us-beer-market.html> (accessed March 4, 2019).

⁴⁰ Kristen Domonell. “10 Reasons To Have A Beer Right Now.” *Men’s Health* (December 27, 2015). <https://www.menshealth.com/health/a19545586/have-a-beer/> (accessed March 4, 2019).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

can be addictive and can cause or worsen other health problems.”⁴³ The results seem to point in a direction that there may be some positive effects on the body of a person who drinks alcohol in moderation. Moderation is determined to be one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men with each drink containing 14 grams of pure alcohol. This equates to 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits.⁴⁴ While there may be some health benefits, one should weigh these benefits against the risks before deciding to drink alcohol. There are new studies being done that may call into question just how much health benefit there is to moderate drinking. “Many people believe that having a glass of wine with dinner -- or moderately drinking any kind of alcohol -- will protect them from heart disease. But a hard look at the evidence finds little support for that.”⁴⁵ It would appear there is a need for more research before such definitive statements on health benefits can be made.

Other benefits of drinking are of a more subjective nature. Some will utilize drinking to fit in with the norms of society or to associate with their peers. The human need to be accepted is a strong one, and some will choose to drink for the simple reason they are around other people who drink. Drinking to meet a psychosocial need may not

⁴³ Mayo Clinic Staff, “Red Wine and Resveratrol: Good for your heart?,” *Heart Disease* (November 12, 2016). <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/red-wine/ART-20048281?pg=1> (accessed March 1, 2019).

⁴⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Fact Sheets – Moderate Drinking.” (July 25, 2017). <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/moderate-drinking.htm> (accessed April 24, 2018).

⁴⁵ Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs. "Moderate Drinking May Not Ward Off Heart Disease." *ScienceDaily*. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/05/170522080805.htm (accessed March 4, 2019).

be the best argument for drinking alcohol; nonetheless, it is a real perceived benefit.⁴⁶

Since this paper is dealing specifically with the question of whether Christians should drink alcohol, it is important to weigh out the issue of how much one is willing to do to be accepted by a culture rather than impacting it for positive change. Abiding by social norms do not always reflect righteous choices. For young people who turn 21 years old, they are faced with the decision of being of legal age to drink but wonder if they should.

This is reflected in the question of this young man:

I turned 21 last month and a lot of my friends have been getting married recently. Since I am now legally allowed to drink alcohol I have been drinking at bachelor parties and wedding receptions. I was just wondering, since this is so new to me and I am just now figuring out how much alcohol it takes for me to feel anything, how do I know when it is becoming a sin for me to enjoy alcohol? Should I even be drinking looking for an effect on my body?

Note: I think most alcohol (beer, wine, whiskey) tastes gross but I do like the taste of some particular types (rum, cider, etc.)⁴⁷

One can appreciate the honest dilemma this individual is facing. It is reflective of the question that many sincere Christians face, but can find few answers to, and thus the importance of a paper such as this to help guide those in making an informed decision. This individual is faced with being legally allowed to drink alcohol while at the same time being mindful that God carries a standard that is often much different from the society in which we live. The question of finding a level where he “feels” something can itself be the point at which a person who drinks may be beyond their limit. This is

⁴⁶ Archie Brodsky and Stanton Peele. “Psychosocial Benefits Of Moderate Alcohol Consumption: Alcohol’s Role In A Broader Conception Of Health And Well-being.” *The Stanton Peele Addiction Website*. <https://www.peele.net/lib/benefits.html> (accessed March 4, 2019).

⁴⁷ Reddit Reformed. https://www.reddit.com/r/Reformed/comments/2qnwh5/drinking_alcohol_for_enjoyment/ (accessed March 4, 2019).

particularly appropriate when the generally accepted consensus is that impairment begins with the first drink as stated by the National Safety Council. “A single drink can cause a decline in visual function, mental judgment, and motor skills, resulting in driver impairment.”⁴⁸ Impairment will be looked at more thoroughly later in this paper. The aspect of drinking to be socially accepted is particularly voiced when this young man says that he does not care much for the taste of most alcoholic beverages but drinks them anyway based upon his environmental setting. Certainly, his opinion is not the same as everyone, for some people do indeed enjoy the taste of wine or beer.

Enjoying the taste is a benefit that sounds so simple some may overlook it, but there are those who enjoy alcoholic beverages because of its appeal to their taste buds. Besides the large commercial type wineries, there has been a marked increase in local wineries, some of which have an outlet shop in high traffic stores such as Walmart or local grocery stores. People now have an increased interest in learning the proper etiquette involved in wine tasting as revealed in the increase of classes and tours designed to educate being more readily available. Some of these are showing up in community events such as sip and share, sip and shop, and sip and paint. The previous one even has its own website to help people find local events in their area.

Some people who drink alcohol also do so as a form of self-medicating to help them cope with the pressures of life or deal with physical pain. While this benefit can be debated as to its healthiness, for the person trying to cope they would certainly view it as

⁴⁸ “Impairment Begins With The First Drink.” National Safety Council 92019). <https://www.nsc.org/road-safety/safety-topics/impaired-driving> (accessed March 4, 2019).

such.⁴⁹ Of course, the reality is that using alcohol in this capacity does not solve any of life's issues but only hides them for a short time, and the propensity to over-medicating oneself has detrimental effects.

The risks of alcohol consumption can be life-altering. The most obvious, of course, is intoxication. Alcohol in a person's system results in a diminished capacity for making sound decisions which lead to behaviors that cause regret and sometimes even result in death, many times of the innocent. While there may be humorous portrayals of people as drunks such as Foster Brooks or Otis Campbell, drunkenness in real life is destructive to relationships, individuals, and property. But there is a difference between a person who gets drunk and one who is an alcoholic. "Not everybody that misuses a substance has an addiction. Addiction is the long-term inability to moderate or cease intake."⁵⁰ Intoxication and addiction will always bring about varying degrees of regret and destruction.

For the individual that goes beyond the guidelines of moderate drinking, there is an increased risk for damage to the body's organs and systems, such as the heart, liver, pancreas, immune system, and an increased risk for cancer.⁵¹ Even one drink above the

⁴⁹ Archie Brodsky and Stanton Peele. "Psychosocial Benefits Of Moderate Alcohol Consumption: Alcohol's Role In A Broader Conception Of Health And Well-being." *The Stanton Peele Addiction Website*. <https://www.peele.net/lib/benefits.html> (accessed March 4, 2019).

⁵⁰ Adam Felman. "What Is Addiction?" *Medical News Today*. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323465.php> (accessed March 4, 2019).

⁵¹ National Institute On Alcohol Abuse And Alcoholism, "Alcohol's Effects on the Body." <http://niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/alcohols-effects-body> (accessed March 4, 2019).

moderate usage level increases the negative effects and reduces any possible health benefits significantly.⁵² Alcohol abuse is always a destructive force in the lives of people. It is destructive to the person who drinks, it is destructive to their relationships with family and friends, and it can be destructive to people they have never met. This equates to be a destructive force to society as a whole.

Social Effects

In a national study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) in 2018, it was reported that alcohol use over a ten-year period ending in 2013 showed an increase of alcohol use from 65.4% to 72.7% of the adults involved in the survey. The study also revealed that alcohol use disorders increased from 8.5% to 12.7% among the surveyed population during that same time frame.⁵³ While this is only one study, it serves to show that increased alcohol usage also leads to increased alcohol disorders.

One of the debates that are ongoing centers around how to categorize alcohol dependence. Is it a disorder or is it a disease? If it is a disease, then that is a medical condition that affects how it is treated. If it is a disease, the individual is powerless over their illness and unable to change their condition without medical intervention. If it is

⁵² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Fact Sheets – Moderate Drinking.” (July 25, 2017). <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/moderate-drinking.htm> (March 4, 2019).

⁵³ Hui G. Cheng, Hamza Kaakarli, and Joshua Breslau. “Assessing Changes in Alcohol Use and Alcohol Use Disorder Prevalence in the United States.” *JAMA Psychiatry* (February 2018). <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2666764?resultClick=24> (accessed March 8, 2019).

categorized as a disorder, it becomes more a matter of one's choice and puts the responsibility on the individual. They have the power to change by making better choices.⁵⁴ The long-held stance is to view alcoholism as a disease, though that is being challenged by some invested in alternative treatment programs such as psychologist, Stanton Peele.⁵⁵ Other professionals are simply using the terms interchangeably as reflected by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. "Problem drinking that becomes severe is given the medical diagnosis of "alcohol use disorder" or AUD. AUD is a chronic relapsing brain disease characterized by compulsive alcohol use, loss of control over alcohol intake, and a negative emotional state when not using."⁵⁶ For the point of this paper, let it suffice to say that alcohol abuse is a life-controlling condition that affects the individual and extends to those around the individual.

All alcohol consumption above the moderate level of 1-2 drinks per day is considered excessive alcohol use by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.⁵⁷ Excessive alcohol use resulted in approximately 88,000 deaths between 2006- 2010, and

⁵⁴ Deborah Morrow. "Alcoholism Disease: Disease Model Of Alcoholism Is Alcoholism A Disease?" *The Alcoholism Guide*. <https://www.the-alcoholism-guide.org/alcoholism-disease.html> (accessed March 8, 2019).

⁵⁵ Stanton Peele, Archie Brodsky, Mary Arnold. "Why It Doesn't Make Sense To Call Addiction A 'Disease.'" *The Stanton Peele Addiction Website*. https://www.peele.net/lib/truth_1.html (accessed March 8, 2019).

⁵⁶ "Alcohol Use Disorder." National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption/alcohol-use-disorders> (accessed March 8, 2019).

⁵⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Fact Sheets – Moderate Drinking." (July 25, 2017). <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/moderate-drinking.htm> (March 4, 2019).

the economic cost of excessive alcohol use was estimated at \$249 billion.⁵⁸ As these figures show, the excessive use of alcohol carries a high cost financially and in the number of human lives lost. The number of deaths should be especially concerning for those who are Christians since each life that comes to an end has entered eternity. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) is a recognized organization that has made great strides in education and awareness of the dangers of drunk driving, and for good reason. MADD reports that drunk driving is still the number one cause of death on our roadways, and on average someone is killed every 50 minutes in a drunk driving crash (10,497 deaths a year). They also state that there are 290,000 injuries to friends, family and loved ones unnecessarily as a result of “this entirely preventable crime.”⁵⁹ For every one of these lives that have been forever changed, there is most certainly a desire to be able to turn back the clock and be able to make a wiser decision about the use of alcohol.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) is an organization that provides information and help to in regard to drug and alcohol addiction, and they know well the negative effects substance abuse has on our society. “The use of alcohol and drugs can negatively affect all aspects of a person’s life, impact their family, friends, and community, and place an enormous burden on American

⁵⁸ Jeffrey J. Sacks, Katherine R. Gonzales, Ellen E. Bouchery, Laura E. Tomedi, and Robert D. Brewer. “2010 National and State Costs of Excessive Alcohol Consumption.” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (November 2015). <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm> (accessed April 24, 2018).

⁵⁹ MADD. https://www.madd.org/?_ga=2.210872469.1249706682.1524615788-143498554.1524615788 (accessed March 4, 2019).

society.”⁶⁰ Not all crimes are committed under the influence of substances, but statistics show that substance use is heavily involved in the majority of crimes against society.

Because alcohol use is legal and pervasive, it plays a particularly strong role in the relationship to crime and other social problems. Alcohol is a factor in 40% of all violent crimes today, and according to the Department of Justice, 37% of almost 2 million convicted offenders currently in jail, report that they were drinking at the time of their arrest.”⁶¹

These statistics are even more alarming when broken down into various levels of society.

The NCADD further reports:

- 1.9 million out of 2.4 million juvenile arrests had substance abuse and addiction involvement.
- 95% of all violent crime on college campuses involves the use of alcohol by the assailant, victim or both.
- 90% of acquaintance rape and sexual assault on college campuses involves the use of alcohol by the assailant, victim or both.
- For victims of domestic violence, alcohol was involved in 55% of the cases.
- For spousal violence, alcohol was a factor in 65% of the cases.
- 40% of child victimizers reported they had been drinking at the time of the crime.⁶²

As can be concluded from the above statistics, alcohol abuse will also increase the likelihood of marriages that end in divorce. One study concluded that over 48% of marriages ended in divorce when one of the spouses was involved in an alcohol disorder, compared with only 30% of marriages when neither spouse drank.⁶³ As a result of

⁶⁰ “Alcohol, Drugs And Crime.” *National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence*. <https://www.ncadd.org/index.php/about-addiction/addiction-update/alcohol-drugs-and-crime> (accessed March 8, 2019).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ James A. Cranford. “Alcohol Dependence and Marital Dissolution: Evidence From the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions.” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. <https://www.jsad.com/doi/full/10.15288/jsad.2014.75.520> (accessed March 8, 2019).

divorce, the impact on the children of our society is also compounded.

Not all abusers of alcohol do so as long-term alcoholics. Some engage in a shorter-term abuse known as binge drinking. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism defines binge drinking as “a pattern of drinking that brings blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels to 0.08 g/dL. This typically occurs after 4 drinks for women and 5 drinks for men—in about 2 hours.”⁶⁴ The legal age for drinking alcohol in the United States has been set to 21 years old. As a result, binge drinking is more of a problem among younger people. Underage drinking is of particular concern since it is first of all illegal but can also lead to habits that will be repeated later in life. It is reported that by the time a teen reaches 18 years old, 70% will have consumed at least one alcoholic beverage.⁶⁵ This behavior increases as they head out to the college campus and are immersed in a social culture where they want to be accepted and feel more of a sense of freedom to experiment. This behavior has negative results in their lives. “College students who binge drink are at a greater risk of other problems, including attempting suicide, suffering injuries or other health problems, participating in unsafe sex practices, getting arrested due to breaking laws like vandalism, and driving while drunk.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ “Drinking Levels Defined.” *National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism*. <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption/moderate-binge-drinking> (accessed March 8, 2019).

⁶⁵ “Underage Drinking Statistics Within the US.” *Alcohol.org* (October 23, 2018). <https://www.alcohol.org/teens/underage-drinking-stats/> (accessed March 8, 2019).

⁶⁶ “Binge Drinking & Alcoholism on College Campuses.” *Alcohol.org* (October 23, 2018). <https://www.alcohol.org/teens/college-campuses/> (accessed March 8, 2019).

When it comes to driving un the influence, currently in the United States the legal blood alcohol content (BAC) level is at .08. Just over thirty years ago the BAC was at .15, and as few as fifteen years ago it was at .10 in some states. There is a move to lower the BAC even further in our country with the State of Utah recently enacting a .05 BAC.⁶⁷ For comparison, other countries in the world have even lower rates than our current national level, such as France at .05 and Japan at .02.⁶⁸ Such a move would certainly have an impact on those who would drink and legally be able to operate a motor vehicle.

The followers of Jesus Christ are commanded by Him to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). Fulfilling such a command will also cause Christianity to have a positive influence on our society. The church is to function as Christ’s body upon this earth in all cultures where it is found. With that in mind, this paper will now examine the stances of various Christian organizations in regard to alcohol usage, and how Christians can have the greatest influence on this society in fulfilling the Great Commission.

⁶⁷ Deborah A.P. Hersman. “Oped: Impairment Begins With The First Drink, And Utah Made The Right Move.” *The Salt Lake Tribune* (March 27, 2017). <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=5095391&itype=CMSID> (accessed March 8, 2019).

⁶⁸ William C. Head. “Legal Alcohol Limit In Georgia.” <https://bubbahead.com/legal-alcohol-limit-in-georgia/> (accessed March 8, 2019).

Chapter 3

What Should A Christian Do?

For reasons of upbringing, doctrinal stance or biblical interpretation, many Christians have a defined stance on the issue of alcohol consumption. However, due to the complexity of the issue, there are other conscientious Christians who are uncertain where to draw the line in regard to alcohol use, and who genuinely want to live a life that is pleasing and honoring to the Lord. Whether there is a strong position or a level of uncertainty, many Christians will follow the lead of those they believe have been placed in positions of spiritual authority over them.

Denominational Positions

The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit that there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give his church. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality-but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets, and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers.⁶⁹

Charles Swindoll's comparison of the local church and the local bar is an intriguing look at the similarities and differences of what both offer, or are supposed to. At one time, the similarities of the bar and the church would have stopped short of serving alcohol, but times are changing. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the consumption of alcoholic

⁶⁹ Charles Swindoll. "Lessons From A Tavern." Heart To Heart (February 14, 2016). <https://hearttoheart3.wordpress.com/category/charles-swindoll/> (accessed March 16, 2019).

beverages in the American culture has been on the increase, and it is not only with those who attend the local bar but also those who attend the local church.

Christian churches have differed in their approach to the alcohol issue throughout the centuries. Some believe that the variety of ethnic cultures that Christians came from played a significant role in their stance on alcohol consumption.

Numerous studies from both the United States and Europe have suggested that Protestants consume less alcohol but perceived great problems with the substance. In contrast, Roman Catholics consume more alcohol but do not perceive its consumption as problematic. The reason for this may be based in the distant past. Recent research (Engs 1991a; 1995) has suggested that in antiquity different drinking cultures developed in the Northern and in the Mediterranean areas of Western Europe. This was due to a number of factors including the ecosystem, seasonal variations, climate, and socio-political structures.⁷⁰

It is a well-known fact that the United States is a melting pot formed by the immigrants of different nationalities. It follows suit that churches in our country share differing views and teachings concerning alcohol usage. The following will be a summary view of the positions that are reflected in just a few of various denominations that exist in the United States.

As referenced in Engs earlier quote, the Roman Catholic position on alcohol finds no issue with its consumption. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine. Those incur grave guilt who, by drunkenness or a love of speed, endanger their own and others' safety on the road, at sea, or in the air.”⁷¹ One of the basic

⁷⁰ Ruth C. Engs, “Protestants and Catholics: Drunken Barbarians and Mellow Romans?” 2000, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. <http://www.indiana.edu/~engs/articles/cathprot.htm> (accessed March 16, 2019).

⁷¹ “Respect for Health,” (2290). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition. <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p3s2c2a5.htm#2290> (accessed March 18, 2019).

teachings of Christianity is that the followers of Jesus Christ are always to consider the importance of others more than one's own (Phil 2:3). This will prove an important consideration as this paper moves forward. The Catholic position of moderation is supported in the writings of Trevor Jin who serves as a leader in Catholic college campus ministry known as FOCUS. The Catholic Church continues to support alcohol consumption in moderation. "For centuries, monks have brewed beer to support their monasteries. We even have patron saints of beer, wine, hangovers, and alcoholics (St. Augustine, St. Urban, St. Bibiana, and St. Monica respectively)."⁷² While the Catholic Church's official position is one of moderation, the need of having a patron saint for hangovers leads one to believe that there may be a sizable gap between the official position and practical application of adherents. Jin states that "alcohol is inherently good" in answer to the question of if drinking alcohol is a sin?⁷³ To his credit, he does go on to further stipulate the dangers of drinking in excess and to even recommend that there may be situations when it is beneficial to abstain from alcohol consumption.⁷⁴

One of the challenges, if not responsibilities, to those who hold to a position of moderation should be to provide clarification and instruction to those who adhere to their organization. To further show the need for clarification of what the Catholic position on moderation actually means in practice, Father Edward McIlmail answered a question asked by a new adherent to the Catholic Church.

⁷² Trevor Jin. "What Is the Catholic Church's View on Alcohol?" *We Dare To Say* (March 20, 2016). <https://wedaretosay.com/what-is-the-catholic-church-view-alcohol/> (accessed March 18, 2019).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Being a new Catholic, I'm still learning many things. I just recently found out that getting drunk is a mortal sin. Every time I have a few drinks now, and even slightly feel the effects of the alcohol, I'm terrified that I just committed a mortal sin. Can you please explain if a few beers making me feel a little different is a mortal sin, a venial sin, or nothing at all?⁷⁵

One can appreciate the sincerity of this individual's concern for how his/her actions impact his/her spiritual life by asking this question of someone who can provide an answer. Father McIlmail's answer included this:

Feeling the effects of alcohol is normal. The sinfulness of those effects might depend on circumstances. A person who is at home and plans to stay at home might be able to have a second or third beer without any problem (read: without sin). That same person might do well to skip the second or third beer if he has to drive a car afterward. Driving in an impaired state could be a mortal sin since it puts others as well as oneself at risk of death or serious harm.⁷⁶

There are some serious concerns with this answer. First, it puts the amount of alcohol to be consumed on the individual to know their own limit before becoming drunk. How does one learn their limitations unless they consume an amount that causes them to go over that limit? How many times will this need to be repeated since drug tolerance levels can increase the amount needed to "feel" the effects? Second, the amount consumed seems to be determined more by location than the amount. One of the dangers of alcohol impairment is that it affects a person's judgment. To recommend that a person can drink more because they are at home could certainly lead to an impaired judgment that they are fine to use a power tool or even drive to the store. The Father follows up this advice by

⁷⁵ Fr. Edward McIlmail. "Ask A Priest: How Much Beer Is OK To Drink?" RCspirituality (June 5, 2015). https://rcspirituality.org/ask_a_priest/ask-a-priest-how-much-beer-is-ok-to-drink/ (accessed March 18, 2019).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

adding this statement. “If ever in doubt about whether you crossed the line, then just go to confession and put it behind you and resolve not to cross the line again.”⁷⁷

The Catholic Church is one of the Christian organizations that utilizes alcoholic wine in the observance of the Eucharist. It is not the purpose of this paper to challenge the theological implication of the Catholic observance of the Eucharist, only to point out the usage of wine in its observance. In the majority of Catholic masses, the priest consecrates the bread and the cup, but only the priest drinks from the cup while the laity only receives the bread. It is of interest to note that one Catholic author who supports the moderation position and argues against the abstinence position offers his commentary on Leviticus 10:8-9. “The Lord then spoke to Aaron, saying, “Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations....” “Most people are not allowed to drink on the job, be they priests, kings, or modern day accountants and plumbers. But that does not mean we cannot enjoy alcoholic refreshments when we are not at work.”⁷⁸ While this commentary may allow for the practice of moderation at home, it would seem to call into question whether a Catholic priest who is certainly in the position of ministering (working) before the Lord during the Mass should be drinking alcoholic wine as a part of the Eucharist. This may also call into question all denominations who utilize alcoholic wine as a part of their Communion observances. One popular quote that is espoused by many within Catholicism and even

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Trent Horn. “The Bible Does Not Forbid Alcohol.” *Catholic Answers* (July 31, 2014). <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/the-bible-does-not-forbid-alcohol> (accessed March 18, 2019).

promoted among its commercial advertising is from Hilaire Belloc: “Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine, there’s always laughter and good red wine.”⁷⁹ Touting the open usage and availability of wine may not be the best representation of the mission of Christ.

The Episcopal Church has held a long tradition of supporting alcohol usage both inside and outside the Church. Similarly, they practice the consecration of alcoholic wine by the priest to be used for the Eucharist. It would appear that the leadership of the Episcopal Church has recognized their stance on alcohol has allowed for misuse and abuse, even among their clergy. In 2015, the Diocese of New York adopted some sweeping changes in how alcohol usage is promoted within the church. This included the admonition to forbid underage drinking, that alcohol consumption cannot be promoted at church events, that events where alcohol is served must have established leadership to monitor consumption, churches can no longer promote community events such beer or wine tasting, and that the clergy may consider providing non-alcoholic wine for the sacrament.⁸⁰ The need for such a resolution acknowledges the dangers associated with alcohol usage without guidelines. The Episcopal Church not only permitted but at times encouraged the drinking of alcohol among its members and priests according to the experience of Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith:

I never felt peer pressure to drink until I joined the Episcopal Church. Let me give you a few examples of what I mean. So many times at church events, when I am offered a glass of wine or a beer, and I decline...immediately the person follows

⁷⁹ Hilaire Belloc. “Hilaire Belloc Quotes.” Goodreads. https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/4025.Hilaire_Belloc (accessed March 25, 2019).

⁸⁰ “Episcopal Church Policies on the Use of Alcohol.” The Episcopal Diocese of New York. <https://www.diocesen.org/2015-general-convention-resolutions-on-alcohol/> (accessed March 18, 2019).

up with, "it is ok, you can have a drink." I usually have to refuse the drink two or three times before the person will let it go. During an interview process for a position in a church, I was offered a drink by a vestry member during the social time before dinner. When I stated that I was "good" with the water I was drinking, this vestry member stated, "We like to drink with our priest." There is a culture in the Episcopal Church of drinking and being proud of it.⁸¹

When alcohol use that has been permitted and encouraged among the clergy and church leadership results in misuse, abuse, and addiction, it only makes sense that the laity will follow suit. This has risen to such a severe level within the Episcopal Church that in 2017 a commission was established to study and report on impairment and leadership within the clergy. The report states, "the commission has discovered that in many instances, church polity has impeded the ability of the church to intervene, assess, and treat impaired people and care for the injured community."⁸² This was following the tragic death of an individual who was killed by a priest who was driving under the influence. One can surmise that the Episcopal Church would not have to deal with such systemwide issues and the heartache they have caused if alcohol abstinence was their policy.

The International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies (IFCA) was formerly known as the Christian Churches of North America (CCNA) and is an organization of which this author has personal experience. In its foundational history, the IFCA is a Pentecostal organization that has roots for some of their membership that goes back to

⁸¹ Hillary B. Smith, "Alcohol and the Episcopal Church," *Angels In The Alley* (January 10, 2015) <http://drhilarysmith.blogspot.com/2015/01/alcohol-and-episcopal-church.html?m=1> (accessed March 18, 2019).

⁸² "Report of the Commission on Impairment and Leadership" (March 1 2017). <https://houseofdeputies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/pdf-Impairment-Commission-Report-1-March-2017.pdf> (accessed March 18, 2019).

their Italian heritage and involvement in the Roman Catholic Church.⁸³ As such, they held a position that allowed for the moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages such as wine, but this did not apply to all alcoholic beverages. My grandfather and father served as pastors and my uncle served as a lifetime missionary in Europe for the CCNA. At family reunions and special occasions, it was not uncommon for a glass of wine to be served as part of a meal or celebration in my grandparents' home; however, beer was strictly prohibited. This was reflective of their Italian heritage which accepted wine as a beverage that did not challenge their commitment to Christ, but beer was viewed as a drink that Americans drank to get drunk, and thus went against their faith. This is a dichotomy that I still find intriguing as it reveals they had separation of good versus bad alcoholic beverages based upon cultural norms.

The Assemblies of God is recognized as the largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States and has always held to a position of abstinence in regard to alcohol consumption. The General Council of the Assemblies of God has historically opposed the consumption of alcohol in any form. Early documents of the church declare, without reservation or compromise, a position of total abstinence. "From its inception, the Assemblies of God has been unequivocally committed to abstinence from alcoholic beverages, a conviction firmly rooted in what the Bible teaches about the abuse of wine,

⁸³ "About Us." *International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies*. <http://ifcaministry.org/about-us> (accessed March 25, 2019).

the consumption of strong drink, and also in its cardinal ethical principle of love for God and others.”⁸⁴ This position was reaffirmed by the General Presbytery in 2016.⁸⁵

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is the largest protestant denomination in the United States with a membership of over 16 million people.⁸⁶ Like the Assemblies of God, they have held to a long position of abstinence when it comes to alcohol use. Foy Valentine served the Southern Baptist Convention as the Executive Director of the Christian Life Commission (1960-1987). He identifies himself as a Christian ethicist by calling and by training.⁸⁷ He states:

I perceive alcohol consumption not as amoral but as immoral, not as an inalienable right but as an unconscionable wrong, not as defensible in our free country but as indefensible in any country, not as a social grace but as an anti-social disgrace. I believe that alcohol abuse can best be prevented by abstinence from alcohol, as lung cancer can best be prevented by abstinence from cigarettes, and that abstinence is the only live option for churches in our culture that expect to deal successfully and effectively with the alcohol problem.⁸⁸

While Valentine may not speak for all members of the SBC, his views are still held by a majority.

⁸⁴ “Abstinence From Alcohol,” *Assemblies of God Position Paper* (2016). <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Abstinence-from-Alcohol> (accessed March 25, 2019).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Thom S. Rainer. “The 15 Largest Protestant Denominations in the United States.” *The Christian Post* (March 27, 2013). <https://www.christianpost.com/news/the-15-largest-protestant-denominations-in-the-united-states.html> (accessed March 22, 2019).

⁸⁷ Foy Valentine, “A Case For Abstinence (Alcohol),” *The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*. (December 2, 2008) <http://mail.erc.com/article/a-case-for-abstinence-alcohol> (accessed April 25, 2018).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does not prohibit the use of alcohol among its members, but neither does it encourage it. “The General Assembly encourages and supports personal decision to abstain from alcohol. For those who choose to drink and can do so without becoming dependent, the General Assembly urges a pattern of moderate and responsible drinking behavior.”⁸⁹

The United Methodist Church is the second largest protestant denomination in the United States.⁹⁰ As such, it carries significant influence in the lives of millions of Christians. Their official position on alcohol consumption is as follows: “Alcohol is a drug, which presents special problems because of its widespread social acceptance. We affirm our long-standing conviction and recommendation that abstinence from alcoholic beverages is a faithful witness to God’s liberating and redeeming love.”⁹¹ Because the leadership recognizes the damaging effects that alcohol has on our society, they have declared that the selling or serving of alcohol in all of their facilities is to be prohibited.⁹² It would appear, however, that they leave room for individuals to choose if they will drink alcoholic beverages even when they do not believe it allows for the best witness for Christ. The question of alcohol consumption is addressed in the official UMC News

⁸⁹ “Alcohol.” *Presbyterian Mission*. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/alcohol/> (accessed March 25, 2019).

⁹⁰ Thom S. Rainer. “The 15 Largest Protestant Denominations in the United States.” *The Christian Post* (March 27, 2013). <https://www.christianpost.com/news/the-15-largest-protestant-denominations-in-the-united-states.html> (accessed March 22, 2019).

⁹¹ “Book of Resolutions: Alcohol and Other Drugs.” UMC.org. <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/alcohol-and-other-drugs> (accessed March 22, 2019).

⁹² *Ibid.*

publication. When asked if drinking alcohol was permissible the answer is somewhat confusing from the denomination's official position.

May we? Yes. We do not prohibit our members from doing so responsibly “with deliberate and intentional restraint.”⁹³ However, The United Methodist Church has long believed that abstinence from alcohol and other drugs witnesses to “God’s liberating and redeeming love” and is part of living the life God has prepared for us.

One is left to wonder how the position of the organization can co-exist in stark opposition to the practice of its members? “May United Methodists drink alcohol? Yes. But it is not enough to ask whether we drink alcohol or not. Ask us instead what we’re doing to show our love for God and every neighbor whom alcohol may adversely affect.”⁹⁴ The United Methodists voice a strong commitment to helping people who struggle and suffer as a result of various addictions with support and counseling. One would question if some of that concern for others should be shown before embarking in the consumption of alcohol that may have a negative effect on someone else. It would seem that fulfilling the highest command of loving God with every facet of our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves should undergird the Christian’s daily decisions since it forms the basis of all that is Christian (Matt 22:36-40). In other words, we show our love for God as we obediently follow after His desires, and love others more than ourselves. We would do well to consider how our actions may affect others negatively before we engage in them.

The varied Christian stance on drinking alcoholic beverages creates confusion among people, both who attend and do not attend churches. There is an increasing

⁹³ “Ask The UMC: May United Methodists Drink Alcohol?” *UM News* (May 23, 2018). <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/ask-the-umc-may-united-methodists-drink-alcohol> (accessed March 22, 2019).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

movement for some churches to serve alcohol as a regular part of their services or as an outreach to the community to increase their attendance.⁹⁵ While offering beer is certainly an incentive for some people to attend a church service who may not typically do so, one could legitimately question if outreaches of this type are actually motivated by fulfilling the Lord's command to make disciples? To be fair, this question could be applied to many events and activities that local churches may be involved in, but those are outside the focus of this paper.

As one can see, there is a wide variance of perspective and doctrine among Christian denominations in the United States on the use of alcohol, and it does not look like there will be any ecclesiastical unity on this subject before the return of the Lord Himself. But each pastor, church leader, and denominational administrator should recognize the weight of their teaching, decisions and doctrinal statements on the lives of people and the responsibility that befalls such positions. Samuele Bacchiocchi states the gravity of his concern as such:

Christian churches bear some responsibility for the alarming drinking problems of our time, because through their beliefs, teachings and preaching they are able to influence the moral values and practices of society, possibly more than any other institution. What pastors preach from their pulpits, and what Sabbath or Sunday school teachers teach in their classes regarding drinking, determines to a large extent the stand church members take toward the use of alcoholic beverages.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Leonardo Blair. "Loving God and Craft Beer; Churches Combine Beer and Hymns in Rollicking Services to Combat Dwindling Numbers." *Christian Post* (November 4, 2013). <https://www.christianpost.com/news/loving-god-and-craft-beer-churches-combine-beer-and-hymns-in-rollicking-services-to-combat-dwindling-numbers-108040/> (accessed March 30, 2019).

⁹⁶ Samuele Bacchiocchi. *Wine In The Bible: A Biblical Study On The Use Of Alcoholic Beverages*. (Biblical Perspectives, 1989), 38.

Law of Love

For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or [to do anything] by which your brother stumbles (Rom 14:15-21).

This passage is often referred to as reflecting the Law of Love. It follows along the Christian principle of living a lifestyle that is to consider others more important than ourselves. When speaking with those over the years who practice moderation in the use of alcohol, I have never heard the argument of how it is done for the benefit of someone else. The debate always seems to focus upon a person's right as a believer in Christ, their liberty, their freedom, and that any who would oppose that are engaging in nothing short of legalism. Yet in this passage of Scripture, Paul speaks clearly and directly that followers of Jesus Christ are more pleasing to God and man by denying their own interests for the spiritual benefit of others. Keith Malcomson summarizes it in this way, "The doctrine of social drinking cares more about its own rights than the health of the Church."⁹⁷ The Apostle Paul cared greatly for the health of the church, living his life in the best way possible so that others would come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In this way, Paul was following the example of his Savior who willingly laid down His life for the benefit of others. It would appear from the teaching of Christ and the writings

⁹⁷ Keith Malcomson. *Sober Saints: Should Christians Drink Alcohol?*. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 93.

of Paul, and other biblical authors, that all mature believers would want to emulate such lifestyle choices as it relates to this and all aspects of life.

I personally know a man named Frank (not his real name) who has experienced the damaging effects of alcohol abuse in his life. I have spent many hours speaking with Frank and his wife. His story is not unlike many others who sit in churches across our country from week to week. Over twenty years ago he was addicted to alcohol and drugs. For many years he thought he could manage his addiction separately from his family and work life. As happens with addiction, it became the controlling influence in his life and wrought havoc and destruction. Even though he was eventually able to get help and by the grace of God restore his marriage, his adult children have very little contact with him at this point in his life. Over the years he became active in giving his testimony and speaking to young and old about the dangers of drinking alcohol. He knew from experience that had he not had that first drink of alcohol, it would not have progressed into the destructive force in his life that it became. Unfortunately, just a few years ago, he succumbed to the temptation to pick up the bottle again, and once again his life spiraled out of control. He lost his job, was arrested, ended up in prison, and was eventually released. However, the effects of alcohol on his judgment caused him to attempt suicide which was not successful. He spent many months in the hospital recovering from his injuries, and it was a long road, but after a couple of years he was restored to his wife and alcohol was out of his life again. It was after these events that he told me of his experience in attending a church where the pastor began to publicly proclaim that drinking alcohol in moderation was completely acceptable for all Christians. Frank made an appointment to speak with the pastor about this, but it was met with resistance. He

eventually had to leave that church because he could not allow himself to be exposed to such an opportunity for temptation again.

While this story may evoke multiple emotions, it was not shared for that purpose, rather that it would be a real illustration that we do not always know the weaknesses the people around us. It also shows how the followers of Christ must daily consider the “law of love” as we interact with other people, and if it is within our power to deny ourselves some type of food or drink for the benefit of another we should be more than willing to do that. Self-sacrifice is not a naturally appealing aspect of humanity, but it is to be one of the signifying attributes of a disciple of Jesus. “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

Addiction is a life-controlling and many times destructive force in people’s lives and goes beyond alcohol and drugs. People can be addicted to sex, pornography, gambling, food, work, etc. The psychological and medical research on addiction tends to focus on it as a person’s propensity to make choices and form habits based on genetics and environmental factors avoiding the context of the moral fabric of man.⁹⁸ A biblical perspective does not negate that there are psychological or medical reasons for addiction, but it comes back to the fall of man and the battle that rages between the spirit and the flesh. All of humankind has sinned and this nature that focuses on pleasing ourselves can lead anyone into the realm of addiction. One author states it this way, “In a metaphorical idiom, we are all addicts. The experience of addiction is thus not far from any one of

⁹⁸ Hans Madueme. “Addiction and Sin: Recovery and Redemption.” *AMA Journal of Ethics* (January 2008). <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/addiction-and-sin-recovery-and-redemption/2008-01> (accessed March 30, 2019).

us.”⁹⁹ Sharon Hersh is an addiction expert and counselor and defines addiction as “any behavior, idea, or relationship that becomes central and takes God’s place in our life.”¹⁰⁰ This definition is based in a person’s innate (sinful) desire for pleasure, approval, or to escape painful situations. Not all such addictions are easily recognizable or socially destructive. An individual who is a workaholic may not be disapproved of in society and may even be applauded for achieving a certain level of success, but if he has allowed a drive for worldly success to supplant God’s rightful place, then he is morally culpable for such a decision. The same could be said of all addicts who at one time had full control of their choices and decisions before addiction took hold over them. If a devoted follower of Jesus Christ was aware that a person was going to make a first choice that would result in addiction, it would be incumbent upon them to do all they could to help that individual make the best choice possible. As it relates to the subject of this paper, the “Law of Love” would compel a Christian to do what is necessary to keep another person from falling into such a state. Since it is highly unlikely that the average person can know ahead of time which people around them is susceptible to alcohol abuse or addiction, it would seem wise that we would not set temptation before another person that may cause them to stumble. “One of the risks of casual usage is easy addiction. Some are going to get hooked from the first time. And no one knows ahead of time his susceptibility. The best way to prevent addiction is never to begin.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Sharon Hersh. “Breaking Free From Addictions,” (Part 1 of 2). *Focus On The Family* (August 6, 2012). <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast/breaking-free-from-addictions-pt1> (accessed March 30, 2019).

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The question of “Can a Christian drink alcohol?” may still be asked by many people, but the purpose of this paper is to cause those who read it to consider the question on a deeper level and ask, “Should a Christian drink alcohol?,” and “What is the safest and absolute best decision to be made as a Christian in the United States?”

This author presupposes that the reader acknowledges the Bible as being the inspired Word of God, and as such, is authoritative in the choices and experiences of life. Even so, it does not provide a specific command that would make a person’s choice clearer such as, “Thou shalt not drink alcohol.” Without such a verse, one must examine the passages where alcohol is mentioned, and the spiritual principles contained throughout Scripture. It has been shown that the definition of the English word *wine* has not always been understood as a fermented beverage as it is commonly understood today but was also understood as the juice of the fruit. This carries deep significance as people carry the current meaning of words as it relates to the translation of ancient documents. The words used for *wine* in the Hebrew and Greek languages likewise do not denote alcohol content alone, therefore, one must employ the hermeneutic principle of using context to supply meaning. Employing this tool allows for the plausibility of certain key passages used by those who favor moderation in drinking wine. Examples such as Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, or Paul’s advice for Timothy to use a

¹⁰¹ Bob Walszewski, Loren Eaton, and Adam Holz. “The Vicious Truth About Drug Addiction and Alcoholism.” Focus On The Family. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teens/vicious-truth-about-drugs-and-alcohol> (accessed April 1, 2019).

little wine for his stomach ailments does not necessarily support the position of moderate alcohol use. In fact, as one looks at the totality of Bible verses on the subject, one finds that there are far more warnings against alcohol use than those that would support it. At the very least, one should conclude alcohol usage comes with greater danger, both physically and spiritually, than benefit.

In the history of the United States, it was shown that there was a move toward temperance that was marked by a period of spiritual renewal and revival. Rev. Charles Finney was known as a preacher empowered by the Holy Spirit. His preaching resulted in many people coming to a personal faith in Jesus Christ which in turn brought about an impetus toward social reform which included the anti-slavery and temperance movements. One must not overlook the connection between spiritual revival and the moving away from the apparent vices of society.

Those who continue to stand in favor of alcohol moderation will often utilize the data of research studies that propose various health benefits to those who drink alcohol in moderation. It is acknowledged that there are studies showing possible health benefits from antioxidants such as resveratrol that improve cholesterol levels and help prevent heart disease. However, those who desire such health benefits can find them naturally in various berries and in the variety of supplements that are available, avoiding the dangers that come along with alcohol use. It should be noted that as soon as the level of alcohol use goes above the moderate level of one or two drinks per day, any perceived health benefits are lost.

In the United States, it is evident that we are a culture that promotes alcohol consumption through all avenues of media. This has resulted in increased usage among

all ages, which has resulted in increased levels of alcohol abuse. This is reflected in the number of deaths (10,497) and injuries (290,000) that are caused by alcohol use each year. These are completely avoidable injuries and deaths if alcohol use was avoided. The same could be said of the other crimes that are attributed to alcohol. Violent crimes such as murder, rape, physical assault, domestic violence, and child abuse could be drastically cut if better choices were made in regard to alcohol consumption.

As followers of Jesus Christ, the church is to have a positive influence on the societies that they are a part of. Even though there is not a unified consensus on alcohol use among denominations, churches, or pastors, each Christian is challenged to examine and make the best choices available to them that results in the greatest glory to God. As such we are to live our lives loving God and loving others. This requires us to filter our choices through the “Law of Love” which puts others first as a result of our love for the Lord. This requires conscientious choices to be made in light of the addictive nature of alcohol coupled with humanity’s propensity to sin that is expressed through various levels of excess and overindulgence. As a result, our choices must be made that reflects the self-sacrificing example of Jesus Christ that considers what is best for others instead of ourselves.

In support of the position of alcohol abstinence, this author has utilized the deduction of biblical passages and weighing out the sociological and medical evidence to show that alcohol abstinence is the safest and best choice for the Christian who lives in the United States.

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