

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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A BIBLICAL LOOK AT “SOCIAL DRINKING”

Part Three

by Lee Moses

The “Health” Argument

The fourth argument to be examined in this series on “social drinking” is the “health” argument. If drinking alcoholic beverages is healthful to one’s body, then drinking alcoholic beverages contributes to responsible stewardship of one’s body. Certainly, responsible stewardship of one’s body is part of Christian living (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 4:2). However, is the recreational drinking of alcoholic beverages truly a necessary or wise means of performing this stewardship?

There are two primary passages of Scripture to which professed Christians appeal when seeking to justify social drinking for health reasons. The first is Proverbs 31:6-7: “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.” Before jumping to the conclusion that depression gives one carte blanche to drink up, one might consider the context in which this statement is made. Primarily, one might consider that the context is set within a **prohibition against** alcohol. Consider the passage with the previous two verses included:

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine;

nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more (Proverbs 31:4-7).

This exhortation, which King Lemuel heard of his mother, emphasized far more what he as a king was **not** to do than what one who was ready to perish was **to** do. Christians, who have been made “*kings and priests*” (Revelation 5:10), would do well to consider this kingly exhortation (as well as the priestly prohibition against drinking alcohol in the performance of priestly responsibilities – Leviticus 10:8-11).

The second passage appealed to in the “health” defense of social drinking is First Timothy 5:23: “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.” First of all, it is by no means certain that this “wine” Paul instructed Timothy to use was alcoholic. Timothy was apparently drinking **only** water, and “the water at Ephesus and such places being often bad, grape juice or *chomets*, or Roman *posca*, or *asis*, or

other such drink, could help the stomach.”¹ Nonetheless, even if one were to grant that Paul instructed Timothy to use a little alcoholic wine to alleviate his infirmities, this hardly justifies using it in a social setting or in a recreational way. Doctors prescribe morphine for patients, a legitimate use of the drug when patients are in need. But this does not justify using morphine recreationally or socially.

In recent years, there has been research indicating that moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages may be beneficial to one’s health. Researchers claim prevention of heart disease as the chief benefit. These findings have received quite a bit of news coverage. I believe there are two primary reasons the news media continues to herald the news far and wide of the potential benefits of drinking alcohol. First, because it remains shocking. Everything people ever learned about alcoholic beverages indicated that they were extremely **unhealthy**. The second reason is because it is what people **want** to hear. Many times people will grasp for justification to do what they want to do. So perhaps it should come as no surprise that people use the “health” argument in their attempts to justify social drinking.

Those who have proclaimed the health benefits of moderate amounts of alcohol may well be overstating their case. George Davey-Smith, professor of epidemiology at the University of Bristol (U.K.), came to this conclusion. Reporting on a study he conducted, he said, “We found no protective effect of moderate alcohol for coronary heart disease.”² He

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suggests an important factor that has not generally been considered in previous studies: the non-drinkers in the studies have often included a disproportionate number of unhealthy people, who drank in the past but were forced to give up drinking due to health concerns.³ This clearly could skew the numbers against the non-drinkers.

Perhaps before climbing aboard the “drinking can be healthy” bandwagon, one might consider that what is self-evident and has been known for centuries might actually be true. Regardless of whether potential benefits of moderate drinking continue to emerge, there can be little doubt that the consumption of alcohol is generally unhealthy. **“Even at relatively low levels, alcohol use has well-documented associations with hepatic diseases such as cancer and cirrhosis, as well as breast cancer, hemorrhagic stroke, hypertension, and depression”** (emphasis LM).⁴

The thing is, probably no one **needs** to drink alcoholic beverages to improve his health or to remain healthy. Even those who maintain that moderate drinking can be beneficial acknowledge that one does not have to drink alcoholic beverages to obtain the same benefits. In his syndicated column, *To Your Good Health*, Dr. Paul G. Donohue wrote, “If you prefer to remain non-alcohol users, a daily 12-ounce glass of purple grape juice for men and a 9-ounce grape juice for women also does the trick.”⁵

Considering this, should any Christian be rushing out to buy booze? Picture the seventeen-year old girl who is grabbing a few things at the grocery store, and struggling in her mind and conscience as to whether she should go to the big drinking party that will be taking place that night. Then at the checkout aisle she sees the reputable Christian, for whom she has always had the greatest respect, purchasing a six-pack of beer and a bottle of wine. Is such a sight more likely to dissuade her from going to the drinking party, or to persuade her that it might not be such a big deal after all?

Timothy was clearly reluctant to drink anything but water, lest his influence should be damaged or his purity should be sullied. Today’s Christian should just as jealously and zealously guard his influence and his purity. The “heath” argument fails to justify the social and recreational use of alcoholic beverages, and the watchful Christian will seek to avoid **any** use of this destroyer of lives and souls.

Not “Much Wine” for Deacons

Another argument occasionally advanced for social drinking is that Scriptural qualifications mandate that an elder be “not given to wine” (1 Timothy 3:3), while it is required that a deacon be “not given to *much*

wine” (3:8, emphasis LM). Again, aged women are to be “not given to *much wine*” (Titus 2:3). Thus, the reasoning goes, a deacon, an aged woman, or anyone not an elder is permitted to be given to **some** wine.

To understand what is meant by these differently worded prohibitions, the key is to understand what these passages mean by being “given to” something. The American Standard Version’s rendering of Titus 2:3 helps, as it translates the passage, “not . . . **enslaved to much wine**” (emphasis LM). First Timothy 3:3, which uses a different verb, could be rendered, “not **addicted** to much wine.”⁶ One who is enslaved by or addicted to an alcoholic beverage in any quantity would meet the definition of an alcoholic:

Alcoholism is not a matter of how much or how often one drinks. Some people need just one or two drinks to be out of control, while there are alcoholics who take many drinks and do not seem drunk. Alcoholism shows itself in different ways in different individuals, but dependency is a common factor.⁷

Certainly no rational person would affirm that a practicing alcoholic could serve in the office of a deacon.

Being enslaved by or addicted to wine is certainly not Scriptural, regardless of the quantity in which one consumes it. Being enslaved or addicted to almost **anything** is sinful. As Christ said, “No man can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24), meaning a man must serve God and God alone. Paul reminded the Corinthians, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, **but I will not be brought under the power of any**” (1 Corinthians 6:12, emphasis LM). The only addiction

the Bible **commends** is addiction to the word of the Lord and to well-doing in His service (Psalm 119:131, 147-148; 1 Corinthians 16:15; Romans 12:13).

The difference between being “given to wine” and being “given to *much* wine” has nothing to do with the quantity of wine; it is merely a different way of expressing the quality of man. “Much” is used to heighten the emphasis on not being controlled by wine.⁸ One should not be able to say of a deacon or elder, neither of an older woman nor any Christian, that he is “given to wine”—in any quantity.

Conclusion

The five arguments for social drinking that this series has considered do not stand up under careful Biblical examination. There are other quibbles brought forth by those who claim that social drinking harmonizes with Christian living, but suffice it to say that such quibbles will not hold water either. The fallacy of “social” drinking begins with this very designation—drinking is a serious social **problem**, not a social answer. Drunkenness is roundly condemned by Scripture, and the faithful child of God will never begin that process of becoming drunk (Proverbs 23:31; Ephesians 5:18).

1 Jerry Moffitt, “Did Jesus Allow or Encourage Social Drinking of Intoxicants?” in *Studies in John*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1999), p. 630. See our discussion in the June FCGN regarding “Wine” *As It Is Used in the Bible*.

2 Interviewed by Natasha Mitchell, “The Health Benefits of Frequent, Moderate Drinking Are Exaggerated,” in *Alcohol: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2004), p. 22.

3 Ibid., p. 25.

4 Charlotte LoBuono, “Doctors Should Not Encourage Their Patients to Use Alcohol,” in *Alcohol: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2004), p. 33.

5 Paul G. Donohue, “Alcohol Consumption Could Prevent Heart and Eye Disease,” *To Your Health*, syndicated column, 1998; quoted by Louis Rushmore, *Beverage Alcohol* (Cameron, WV: Louis Rushmore, 2007 revision), p. 19. Brother Rushmore’s book is highly recommended, and is available free of charge plus actual shipping charges. He may be contacted at 705 Devine St., Winona, MS 38967, or via e-mail at rushmore@gospelgazette.com.

6 *Prosechō*, in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 880.

7 Margaret O. Hyde, *Alcohol: Uses and Abuses* (Hillside, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc.), 39.

8 George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, eds. I Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), p. 168.

AM I A RADICAL???

by Roelf L. Ruffner

Recently I read an article by a brother-in-Christ who maintained that Christians were coming out of “liberalism” and “radicalism”. Now I know I am not a liberal (“loosing what God has not loosed”) but I do disagree with this brother on certain issues. He might even maintain that I was a radical (“one who takes an extreme position”). It is a sad day in spiritual Israel when one is called a “radical” for striving to stay with the Scriptures and having a “thus saith the Lord” for what Christians and the Lord’s church do in this world!

Am I a radical because I preach what the Bible says about refusing to fellowship false teachers? Fellowship is turning out to be of prime importance among the churches of Christ in the first decade of the 21st Century. Many Christians (including preachers) base their

fellowship of others upon past “friendships” and associations. They invite “marked” (Romans 16:17) false teachers to speak in Gospel meetings, seminars and lectureships. **Their excuse:** “Well, he is my friend and he won’t teach anything like that here.” Brethren, “friends” can change, but the word of God does not change. They forget what the apostle John and the Holy Spirit decreed: “*If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds*” (2 John 10-11).

Some of my preaching brethren have no qualms about appearing on the same speaking program with a false teacher and remaining quiet as a **church mouse** about this brother’s false teaching. Have they not wondered what the Lord would do if He suddenly returned and found them there? Would Paul have been on the same lectureship with the Judaizers of Acts 15? Would John have allowed himself to be on the same **podium** with a Nicolaitane? (Revelation 2:5-6).

A preacher should preach/teach what the Bible says about fellowship and false teachers. He should also **practice** what he preaches; always mindful of what the Lord sees and not what others think. “*Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*” (Hebrews 4:13).

Am I a radical because I preach that compromise and toleration of false doctrine is a great evil in the church today? Compromise and toleration of false doctrine is a great evil in the world today as it has always been. Speaking specifically of greed but I believe the principle applies here as well, Jesus said, “*No man can serve two masters*”

(Matthew 6:24). We cannot oppose a false doctrine such as Elder Re-valuation/Reaffirmation, in which the office of elder becomes a political football, while holding hands with those who espouse it and practice it. Some brethren have this strange spir- itual weakness called **compromise** which the Lord never had. For example, He did not hold hands with the Sadducees while opposing their materialistic doctrines. *“Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?”* (Matthew 12:24).

The apostle Paul strongly opposed the Judaizers who tried to bring Gentile Christians under the yoke of the Law of Moses. Peter opposed them also (Acts 15:10), yet later **compromised** his position at Antioch by refusing to eat with Gentile brethren when certain of his Jewish brethren were present (Galatians 2:11-15). Peter wanted it both ways. And Paul *“resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned”* (Verse 11, ASV). The Christian also stands condemned before the Lord when they **tolerate** false doctrine/teachers in the name of so called “harmony” and “brotherly love”.

Lord willing, I plan to continue to preach and teach against false doctrine and to refuse fellowship to purveyors of it. Though at times it may be a lonely position, I believe that I am in good company.

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1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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