



“At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder,”
Proverbs 23:32.

Sobriety

Lesson Aim: To issue a call for total abstinence from intoxicating beverages

L454. Date: May 1976. **Text:** I Corinthians 6:9-12;
Proverbs 23:20-22, 29-32. **Topic:** Church Covenant; Wine.

Covenant: “We also engage . . . to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drink as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.”

Society approves the man who can “hold his liquor.” He is played up in magazines, in the movies, and on television. Even the wretched alcoholic is justified or at least uncondemned. Children and adults alike are being anesthetized as day by day they see drinking presented in respectable formats on television. That influence must be counteracted, or the United States of America will become a nation of drunkards.

Today's study is a call for “total abstinence from intoxicating beverages.” It is calling you to personal abstinence; do not drink it. It is calling you to vote against the legalized liquor traffic. It is calling you to refuse to approve it under any form or in any situation. Not temperance, but total abstinence, is the goal of Christian teaching concerning beverage alcohol.

God is concerned with all of life. There are no Bible distinctions between one's “secular” and his “religious” life. The Christian has been totally redeemed so that both body and spirit belong to God (I Corinthians 6:19, 20). He is responsible to God for the totality of his life. That gives all of life a “religious” relationship.

The Church Covenant states, “We further engage . . . to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, and to be zealous in our

efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.”

Abraham Lincoln said, “Liquor may have its defenders, but it has no defense.” Americans do not think that way today. With 500,000 liquor establishments and but slightly over 300,000 churches in the nation, it is time Christians in America took the matter seriously.

I. MAN'S DEPRAVITY

Some passages of Scripture are almost embarrassing to read. Such a passage is I Corinthians 6:9-11. The problem is not with impropriety in the Word, but that it describes man as he is without the sanctifying influence of God's Spirit.

What has happened to man? Left to himself, he suffers a collapse of proper sexual relationships by turning to perversion and licentiousness. Left to himself, he suffers the disintegration of human personality by becoming effeminate and filled with the destructive spirit of hatred. Left to himself, he descends to bestiality rather than ascending to a life which is worthy of one made in the image of God. The thing that has happened to man is that he has fallen into the depravity of sin; he is under the control of Satan.

Do not feel self-righteous, if your sin is not listed in I Corinthians 6:9, 10. That does not mean you are innocent. The Bible declares, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23. It insists that the whole world is guilty before God (Romans 3:19). It concludes, “... **There is none that doeth good, no, not one,**” Romans 3:12.

Depravity simply means that man is weakened in his resistance to sin. It means that he will sin when the opportunity comes. It means there is something wrong with his nature. He not only does wrong things, but he is wrong in himself. The Bible declares that every human being is suffering under depravity. A depraved nature is the explanation of the universal malady of sin among men.

II. GOD'S REDEMPTION

God's grace is the remedy for man's depravity. A reminder of God's redemption should call each believer to triumphant discipleship. After recounting the embarrassing list of sins, Paul continued, “... **Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God,**” I Corinthians 6:11. By one distinct, tremendous act of grace God makes

saints out of sinners.

A. You are washed. The “washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit” make the defiled sinner clean (Titus 3:5). The Word of God communicates the gospel to the sinner. The sinner believes it and trusts Jesus as Saviour. Jesus responds, **“Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you,”** John 15:3. “Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?”— Elisha A. Hoffman.

B. You are sanctified. Positionally set apart unto God in salvation, you become experientially set apart as your life is increasingly brought into line with His will. The “sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience . . .” accompanies God's redemptive act when He saved you (I Peter 1:2). Become what you are — sanctified!

C. You are justified! That means that you have a right to approach God as one who has no sin. Read that list in verses 9 and 10. Rejoice in what God has done for you! You have been “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” Romans 3:24. What a privilege.

III. MAN'S CHOICE

The man who is “in Christ” by faith is “a new creature;” for him, “old things” are forever gone and “all things are become new,” II Corinthians 5:17. Immediately, the new convert is faced with the choice of whether to live in the old manner of life or to live in the new life opened to him. The decision is his. That is why he is encouraged over and over again to “put off the old man” and to “put on the new man,” Ephesians 4:20-32.

Read I Corinthians 6:12. Paul, wrote, “I am free to do anything, but that does not mean everything is good for me to do. All things are lawful for me, but I will not let myself be enslaved by the power of anything. “What did he mean? He meant that the Christian did not live under a legalistic system. His is not a “touch not, taste not” rule of life. He is free in Christ. That does not mean, however, that he can freely engage in any kind of sin. Sin enslaves. The Christian must be free in Christ.

Occasionally a church member will say, “It is no body's business, if I drink a cocktail or a beer.” He is sadly mistaken. He is insisting upon his personal liberty even to the harm it brings to others. That is not Christian freedom! Such a person is in bondage to his appetite for drink; he is not free in Christ. Even if such conduct were permissible, the believer should not be brought under its influence and control. Each believer must make the decision as to who will control his life. Will “self” be the master, or will the

Saviour be the Lord? That is the choice which you must make.

IV. GOD'S PROHIBITION

How does the teaching of I Corinthians 6:9-12 relate to a study of abstinence from alcoholic beverages? It provides the foundation for the appeal to abstinence. "You are a new and different person, since you are in Christ," it declares. "Act in a new and different manner, not after the pattern of those who do not know Him." God has made it clear. **"Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh . . . Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright,"** Proverbs 23:20, 31. To put it bluntly, the Christian should not associate with drunkards and gluttons, not expose himself to situations where he will be enticed to drink intoxicating beverages. God's prohibition is clear.

Why does God prohibit the drinking of alcoholic beverages? He knows what it will do. It will bring human suffering. It will destroy a person's health. It will rob a family of the finances needed for comfortable living. It will take a person's thoughts away from spiritual things. It is conducive to immorality. It is contrary to all the best interests of man. God loves man. He does not want to see him suffer; therefore, He forbids him to participate in that which will harm him.

If God had said it only one time, that would have been enough. The Bible has scores of references and warnings against the use of alcoholic beverages. God repeated the warnings because he wanted believers to keep clear of the sorrow they bring.

V. MAN'S EXPERIENCE

Ministers, family counselors, medical personnel, and others who are in a position to deal with people in need have ample evidence of the harm done to multitudes because of alcoholic beverages. God warned man about them centuries ago. Proverbs 23:21, 29-35 warns that they bring poverty, suffering, sorrow, deceitful dealings, immorality, irreligion, insanity, insensibility to the needs of others, and addiction. One can know a thing by its fruits. Beverage alcohol condemns itself by its victims — suffering wives, neglected children, loss of man-hours from industry, and weakening of the moral fiber of the nation.

Abraham Lincoln was right. "Liquor may have its defenders, but it has no defense." Consider the following indictment of beverage alcohol:

A. Beverage alcohol is indicted at the bar of financial wisdom. "Look at all the tax revenues it brings into the governmental treasury," its advocates exclaim. A study by the State Legislature of Massachusetts revealed that it cost the state six times more than was brought in by taxes to pay the expenses which liquor incurred. In the State of Texas, the ratio was \$53.38 cost for each \$1.00 of revenue when the loss of man-hours from industry was included. What a strange way to make a profit.

Some insist, "It provides employment to many people in its manufacture, transportation, and sale. A study has revealed that one million dollars invested in the liquor industry employs sixty-two people. The same amount invested in soft drinks employs one hundred six, and in the lumber business one hundred thirty-five.

Consider the millions of man-hours lost from work because of drinking, multiply by the minimum wage, to see how profitable it is for men to drink. Not even considering the moral and social problems involved, financial wisdom indicts the effort to legalize beverage alcohol.

B. Beverage alcohol is indicted at the bar of moral virtue. It is conducive to immorality. In public advertisement the champagne cocktail is called "cupid's most loyal and efficient helper." Examine what God said about it in Proverbs 23:33; Hosea 4:11; Genesis 19:30-38. Alcohol dulls that portion of the brain which governs ethical standards. It permits the release of base animal passions. Man loses his moral restraint, like an engine running wild when its governor fails to function, and becomes immoral and brutal. Often the drunkard's own family, those he loves most, are the objects of his drink-inspired brutality. Moral virtue flees when intoxication arises.

C. Beverage alcohol is indicted at the bar of social values. It causes one to lose his sense of values. The home of the drunkard is debased and destroyed. Sixty percent of all broken homes had alcohol involved in the breakdown. The home is the foundation of a nation. The evil is evident!

Youth are demoralized by consumption of beverage alcohol. Seventy percent of all alcoholics began to drink in their youth. The California Youth Authority reported that eighty-five percent of the seventeen thousand delinquents then in custody were involved with alcohol. Wine, beer, and whiskey are major contributors to juvenile and adult delinquency. Thousands of children are receiving support from the Welfare Department of their state because one or both parents drink. Over one-half of the poverty cases result from beverage alcohol.

Consider the statistics. There are now more than nine million problem drinkers in the United States. In 1873 one person in sixty was alcoholic. In 1955 one in twenty-eight was alcoholic. One of each fifteen teenagers today

will become an alcoholic, if the mushrooming trend continues. Fifty percent of all automobile accidents are “alcohol-involved.” Beverage alcohol promotes sclerosis of the liver, hardening of the arteries, high blood pressure, water on the brain, heart damage, digestion problems, and kindred diseases. Ask any medical doctor. Those statistics should convince any intelligent person that God was right in condemning beverage alcohol.

D. Beverage alcohol is indicted at the bar of Scriptural teaching. The Bible terms for alcoholic drink are built on two Hebrew words. **Yayin** means “to wail; to lament.” **Tirosh** means “to go into poverty.” There are seventy-five different Scripture passages which warn against the use of alcoholic beverages. Pause at this point in your study. Read for yourself the following passages: Proverbs 20:1; 23:21; 31:1, 5; Isaiah 5:11; Hosea 4:11; Habakkuk 2:15; Luke 21:34; Romans 13, 14; I Corinthians 6:10; Ephesians 5:18. Your Bible makes it clear! Will you accept God's verdict and live by His dictates?

Some reader has probably already thought, “Why harp on the subject of alcoholic beverage? The problem today is with drugs, not with alcohol.” The thought ignores the fact that alcohol is a depressant, narcotic drug. It is a part of the “drug culture” which has concerned so many. The news media has played up the use of marijuana, LSD, and cocaine, Alcohol is still the most widely used drug. Many who have been in the drug culture are turning from the “heavy” drugs to alcohol. The consumption of beverage alcohol is increasing steadily in our nation. Christians should raise their voices against every form of abuse that brings suffering to people and the violation of the laws of God.

Liquor may have its defenders, but it has no defense! In becoming a member of a Baptist church, you took a solemn commitment “. . . in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly . . . to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.” Do not try to defend the indefensible. Give yourself to getting men saved and sanctified.

Questions

1. What is the distinction between temperance and abstinence?
2. Why do men get involved in debasing sins?
3. What does God do in salvation (I Corinthians 6:11)?
4. How should that affect a believer's conduct?
5. In what sense are “all things lawful”?

6. What are some of the basic Scripture passages which prohibit the use of alcoholic beverages?
7. Why does God prohibit drinking?
8. Upon what basis would you indict beverage alcohol?
9. How is alcoholic beverage a part of the drug culture?
10. How can you apply the lesson to your life and community?