

Drunk or Spirit-Filled?, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 5:18

Code: 49-33

Those of us who know the Lord, those of us who are His living church, those who are His children in the world, the subject of His kingdom and His ambassadors in the earth, have been given a lot of instruction by the Spirit of God through the Word of God. And we're looking at an epistle, the epistle of Ephesians—you can turn to it now—which gathers up so much important instruction for godly living in the world. We find ourselves in chapter 5 now, and verses 18 and 19; and we looked at them last week, and I want us to look at them one more time this morning.

Let me read Ephesians 5:18 and 19: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." We've been doing that. We've been doing exactly what verse 19 says, "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord."

The context of this text is worship, then; clearly it is worship. Verse 18 is the curious verse that we need to address, and we began to do that last week. "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." What does that have to do with worship? That is the question. And the answer is to understand something of the historical background that Paul was facing in the Roman and Greek world.

When Paul contrasts drunkenness with being Spirit-filled he's contrasting pagan religion with the true worship of God through Jesus Christ. Pagan religious experience was induced by drunkenness. True communion with God, the only true God, is empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is the stark contrast.

In ancient pagan religion, and not just in the Greco-Roman world, but all across the planet as long as there has been false religion, a drunken stupor has been thought to somehow elevate people out of the mundane world and lift them up to commune with the deities, with the gods. But Paul says just the opposite is the case. Drunkenness doesn't lift you up, it takes you down. Drunkenness, he says in verse 18, produces "dissipation," or debauchery.

It actually goes further than that. It exposes people to drunkenness. And I'm not talking here, as Paul is not either, about drunkenness in and of itself, but drunkenness associated with false worship. Why was that an issue for Paul? Because it was an issue everywhere in the ancient Roman and Greek world. I'll remind you of a couple of scriptures we looked at last week to clarify even further.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Whether you were in Ephesus or whether you were in Corinth or just about any other city, if you were a pagan and you were engaged in pagan worship, you worshiped by becoming drunk. You went to some temple, you became inebriated, you participated in gluttony. There were temple prostitutes available there. It was the height of debauchery and dissipation. But that was satanic worship, and obviously that is Satan's objective. He wants to lead people into irretrievable, self-destructive, eternally damning debauchery. And so that was the form of

false religion.

When people came to Christ, they came out of that society. And everybody participated in it. There was no separation between religion and social life or religion and political life or religion and economic life. You were part of the culture; you were part of all of it. When people came to Christ they had to leave that behind.

Peter says in 1 Peter 4:3 these words: For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans chose to do, living in debauchery, lusts, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. Again the category, the realm, is false religion and idolatry; and within the framework of that false religion, this is what people did. They lived in debauchery, lusts, drunkenness, orgies, carousing. That was their form of worship, and that is a very popular form of worship. That was the ancient world. So what happens when someone hears the gospel and comes to faith in Christ? They have to make a clean break. That's why Peter said, "You have spent enough time in the past doing that. No more."

First Corinthians 10, then, and verse 14, "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." What was happening was people were coming to faith in Christ in Ephesus or Corinth or anywhere else, and they were still hanging on to some of their previous idolatrous behaviors. He says, "You have to stop that," verse 20, because "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons."

False religion was participating with demons. And he says bluntly in verse 21, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord"—at the table of the Lord—"and the . . . demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons," or you're going to "provoke the Lord to jealousy." That's not a good idea, since you're not stronger than He is. You must separate from that. What was going on in Corinth was that some of the behaviors from their pagan experience were being dragged into the life of the church, and even into the Lord's Table.

If you go over to chapter 11 for just a moment and look at verse 20, he's still talking about the Lord's Table: "Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper." You're not coming to the Lord's Supper—you may say you are, but you're not—because "in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk." Pagan religion was demonic-possession induced. You can't bring that into the life of the church of Jesus Christ. So when we talk about drunkenness in the New Testament, we're not talking about drunkenness only as a stupid behavior, only as a moral issue, only as a sin; we have to see drunkenness in the framework of its large, dominating presence in an ancient culture. Because everyone worshiped, so everyone was engaged in drunkenness, which then invited demonic possession; and that was what led to the debauchery, the deadly debauchery that damned their souls.

The cult of Dionysus was a dominant form of pagan religion in the Greco-Roman world. We talked about it last time; I'll just review briefly. Prevalent through the whole Roman Empire—there is evidence of the worship of Dionysus, archeological evidence in Rome, in Corinth, in Smyrna, Alexandria, Philadelphia, Ephesus, and just about any other place you would go to find archeological digs. Dionysus was supposedly the god who was born to the great god Zeus. The cult of Dionysus began to dominate the Roman world 900 years before Christ, about 900 BC, and it survived all the way into the first couple of centuries after Christ till the day of the church fathers, when the spread of the gospel in the Mediterranean world began to obliterate the Dionysian cult. In archeological digs,

vases, paintings, sculptures, house plates, jars, drinking vessels, pictures from all over the Roman world are found that have the imagery that is associated with Bacchus, who is the Roman name for Dionysus. Debauchery and drinking, emblematic of their lifestyle of religion, is often marked by clusters of grapes.

It would have been probably impossible to go to an ancient city and not run into the Dionysian cult or one of the companion deities. Particularly since we're talking about the Ephesian letter, it's good for us to know that the worship of Dionysus in Ephesus had penetrated every area of the culture, every area of the culture. You have to understand that. This is a very different social structure than we're used to, where there's a secular life and a spiritual life. This was one life, and everyone was involved in it—women, children, slaves, free men, nobility, emperors, poor people. Everybody was involved in the Dionysian cult. It was basically an emphasis on fertility (sex, sexual perversion); gluttony; wild, frenzied festivals (dancing, wine drinking); music (flutes, cymbals, drums, tambourines). It featured the eating of raw flesh—sacrifice offered to Dionysus.

And what were they trying to do? Well this is the theology of the Dionysian cult. It is simply this: that as you become inebriated, and as you engage in the sexual, mad frenzy that is going on in the name of worship, you are allowing Dionysus to enter your body. You are allowing Dionysus to enter your body and to take over; and that's what happened, only it wasn't Dionysus. There was no Dionysus; it was all the demons impersonating him. And so people became demon-possessed. That's why Paul called it "the table of demons," "the cup of demons." And they manifested that demon-possession in *enthousiasmos* and *ekstasia*—in radical, out-of-control, debauched kind of behavior.

Why would anybody want Dionysus supposedly to enter them? Because they were basically deceived to think that his power, his strength, his wisdom, his abilities would become theirs. They would be empowered to be almost godlike. Furthermore, if Dionysus took over, then they would submit to his will as he controlled them in their debauchery. They were thus doing the will of the deity, and that would satisfy the deity so he didn't do any harm to them. So the worship of the cult had everything to do with debauchery, dissipation, drunkenness, wild frenzy.

Just to show you how connected the two were, in verse 18 you see the word "dissipation." That is the Greek word *asōtia*. That became a name for Dionysus. It became a proper name for Dionysus. It was debauchery itself. And what did *asōtia* mean? It's a word that means "debauched," "dissolute," "a profligate behavior that results in self-destruction." Incurable, undisciplined, destructive behavior.

Now out of that, people were coming to the gospel and coming to salvation. And Paul is saying, "From now on, you need to worship the one true God, and you worship Him not under the power of drunkenness and debauchery, but under the filling of the Holy Spirit." Satan produces debauchery; the Holy Spirit produces holiness. Being filled with the Spirit is living under His power, living in the truth and purity and holiness and virtue, being sober-minded, clear thinking, self-controlled, having pure thoughts. That's why Peter said, "It's time to leave the other stuff behind. Leave it behind."

So we talked about that there is no place for drunkenness as a general issue, because the Bible continuously from the Old Testament all the way through the New Testament identifies it as a sin, and identifies drunkenness as a sin in the categories of sins for which people are excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Drunkards will not be in the kingdom of heaven. We see that really, all over the New Testament, wherever you have a list, whether it's in Romans or Galatians or 1 Corinthians, drunkards do not inherit the kingdom of heaven. People can be saved from that—as Paul said, "Such

were some of you; but you have been washed, and you've been sanctified.”

So that's the issue of drunkenness, and that's an explanation, sort of, of the background of this passage, which then brings up the question: OK, we don't worship God by getting drunk. We all agree on that, right? We can agree and affirm that. The question then arises—and this is the text that is a good one to answer it as best we can, and I think we'll endeavor to be thorough about the answer.

“So is it OK for me to drink as a Christian today? Is that forbidden by God? Is that disallowed? Is there a commandment against that? How do I approach imbibing alcoholic beverages?” And I told you last time that I wanted to offer eight questions that you can ask and answer to get a complete response to those questions.

Question number one—remember last time? This is the question where it has to start: Is the alcoholic beverage being consumed in biblical times the same as the alcoholic beverage today? Is the wine then the same as the wine today? And we went through in detail the fact that it is not, it is not.

In ancient times the wine was boiled; therefore all the alcoholic content was out of it. It was turned into a paste almost the consistency of jam. It was put in an animal skin and squeezed out like you would squeeze out honey or jam, and then it was mixed with water, to be mixed 3 to 1 all the way 20 to 1.

That was what people did because they needed to drink wine. Why did they need to drink wine? Because if you drank water, you could become very ill. Remember we said Paul said, “Stop drinking water”—to Timothy—“and take a little wine for your stomach's sake.” Because even though wine ferments—and that can be a problem—that fermentation at a low-level degree in the wine, when mixed with water, kills the bacteria in the water. So it purifies the water. You could also boil the water and have that same effect. But people were very careful about it, and they did not drink unmixed wine. Straight wine, as is drunk today, and other alcoholic beverages that go anywhere from 10 percent to 80 percent alcohol, are basically manufactured with that alcohol content as the objective. It's really the “strong drink” of the Bible, which was forbidden.

So the argument that you can drink alcoholic beverages because people in the Bible drank wine falls apart when you realize that what they were drinking was very different even than the wine today. And the wine may be the most benign of all the possibilities. You can go all the way to 80 percent whiskey and things like that. It was not the same as today. There was no invention of the science of creating alcoholic beverages such as there is today. And again, I say it was fermented, but that was a gift from God to kill the bacteria that was in the water that could be very dangerous to people.

So if you were a Christian believer, you would understand that you needed to be sure you avoided drunkenness. You needed to be sure of that for the sake of your relationship to Christ and His church, but for the sake of your own life and well-being and productivity and everything else. So you did what everybody else did: You mixed it with water, or you boiled it, turned it into a paste, and then remixed it when you squeezed it out. And I said there's an illustration of that in Jesus making wine, which is a very important illustration in John 2.

He made wine in six large pots for a wedding. But do you remember when the wine ran out, what did Jesus tell them to pour in the pots? Water, because it never would have been assumed that they would find wine unmixed and undiluted. Nor would He have created wine unmixed and undiluted. So it was obvious that that would be acceptable for the use of the folks at the wedding.

So that was really just a review of what we saw in detail last week. So the first question, then: Is it the same? The answer is: It is not.

Second question: Is drinking necessary? Is drinking necessary? And the immediate answer is: No, it's not necessary. In ancient times you had to drink what you had to drink. And so you had to protect yourself by mixing it with water, which basically purified the water. You were always drinking more water than wine, but you didn't have a choice in that agrarian culture. It was part of the family, growing of the vines. It was very simple life, and you did what you could to produce what you needed to survive in the heat. And you needed to be hydrated; you needed to be given drink, fluid, in that climate pretty much all year long, obviously. And so they had no choice because the water was not safe. So they had to mitigate against the potential of drunkenness.

In the world in which we live today there's no such necessity. You don't have to make that choice; it's not necessary. They didn't have the choice; we have the choice. I can tell you for me personally, I made the choice a long time ago never to drink any beverage with alcohol content in it at all. I have not suffered from that choice in any way. I have plenty of other things that I can drink. In fact, I have more things to drink than one could ever imagine. It's almost an unearthly experience to just walk down the aisle in the grocery where the drinks are, the non-alcoholic drinks. There's plenty out there. You don't need to put yourself in a position where you could fall victim to drunkenness and the loss of your sober-mindedness.

So that second question: Is it necessary? No, it's not necessary, it's not necessary. You have plenty of things that can take the place of alcohol. Some of you have been shipping me Fresca. You don't have to do it all the time anymore, because I'm not going to go to alcohol. So if I run out of a supply of Fresca, I won't go in that direction, so you're OK if you stop sending it. In fact, I think there might be low supplies of Fresca some places in Southern California because they're in my office.

So there's a third question that immediately follows and it's this: Is drinking wine the best choice? If I can choose to do that, is it the best choice? Well the best choice would be to avoid drunkenness at all costs. So that would be the best choice. But if you want to hedge a little bit on it and ask the question, it's not forbidden in the Bible to drink wine. There's no command to not drink wine. There is an assumption that you won't drink unmixed wine; that was widespread in both the Old and the New Testament. But it's not forbidden.

"So if I make that choice, is it the best choice?" Let me help you with that. Go back to Leviticus chapter 10, Leviticus chapter 10. And there's instruction given by the Lord, direct instruction given by the Lord to Aaron the high priest, the brother of Moses, about himself and the priestly line that would come from his family. It's Leviticus 10 and verse 8, "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'—'When you go to do your priestly duty and to lead the people in the worship of God and to offer the sacrifices and do what priests do, do not drink wine or strong drink.'" And he says, "So that you will not die." Wow.

“So you will not die”? Yes. God may take your life if you come into priestly responsibility drunk—and that “is a perpetual statute through your generations”—the whole Aaronic priesthood—“so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean.” The profane and the unclean religions were marked by drunkenness. The holy and the clean were marked by seriousness, gravity, sobriety. “This is for you,” in verse 11: “Teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.” “You don’t come drunk; they don’t come drunk.”

But death? How is that to be understood? Go back to the beginning of the chapter, chapter 10, verse 1. Two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, were functioning in the tent of the meeting, the place of worship. They took their respective firepans, they put fire in them, placed incense on it to offer the incense offering and they “offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them.” They did something not prescribed, out of order. “And fire”—verse 2—“came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.”

What did they do? We don’t know specifically what they did, but the implications of this tenth chapter are they were drunk, because down in what we just read in verses 8 and following, if you come to the tent of the meeting and you’re drunk, you’ll die. So clearly, drinking is not the best choice. It could bring about, in ancient times, execution by God if you got drunk.

In the sixth chapter of Numbers, the Lord speaks to Moses again, and He says this: “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the Lord’”—now this was just a time of serious consecration to the Lord. It’s called a Nazirite vow from *nazir*, which means “to separate.” So Jewish people could say, “I want to separate, consecrate myself to the Lord for a period of time.” It could be 30 days, 60 days, 90 days. It would be like prayer and fasting, a serious time of consecration to the Lord. A man could do it; a woman could do it.

During that time of complete consecration, dedication, “He shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes.” You stayed away from grapes in every form as part of that consecration. And not only the drinking of the juice, but even the delicacies that were produced with raisins: the raisin cakes that are elsewhere referred to as almost like an aphrodisiac. You stayed away from those kinds of delicacies.

This was the highest act of consecration. And so if you wanted to take the highest ground of holiness and devotion, that’s what you did. And by the way, there were three people in the Bible who took that vow for life, for life. One was Samson in Judges chapter 13, the other was Samuel, and the third was John the Baptist.

There were more people who took that vow; it was common for Israelites to do that. They’re referred to, for example, in the second chapter of Amos, verses 11 and 12, unnamed folks who took that vow. But as time went on, you see in the Prophets that vow began to disappear. And by the time you get to Jeremiah and you get to Lamentations and the cries of Jeremiah over the defective apostate religion of Israel, Lamentations 4:7 and 8 says that those kinds of vows disappeared. Part of what brought about the captivity was people indifferent to the level of consecration that was really the high

ground.

Through Jeremiah, God gives us a really amazing illustration along this same line. So I want to show it to you; I'll take a moment to do that—can't resist the impulse—35th chapter of Jeremiah. Now God's going to give an illustration here. So, "The word of the Lord"—chapter 35, verse 1—"[comes] to Jeremiah from the Lord in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah"—and here's what the Lord says; this is so interesting—"Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak to them"—this is some family of people, some tribe of people outside Israel. "Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak to them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink." Bring them into the house of the Lord, and give them wine to drink. So he does that.

Verse 4, "Brought them into the house of the Lord." Verse 5, "I set before the men of the house of the Rechabites pitchers full of wine and cups; I said to them, 'Drink wine!' But they said, 'We will not drink wine'"—really? These are pagans. "We will not drink wine,"—why?—"for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, 'You shall not drink wine, you or your sons, forever.'"" Their tribal father and their tribal son of that father commanded them not to drink wine; and they didn't do it, they didn't do it.

Look at verse 8: "We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab." Who are they? They're nobody. They're nobody with reference to God or the kingdom of God or the nation Israel. Who are those people? "But we have obeyed [their voice] in all that he commanded us, not to drink wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons or our daughters."

And then go down to verse 14, "The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are observed. So they do not drink wine to this day." This is the Lord now giving you the commentary. "They do not drink wine to this day." Why? Because some guy told them not to. But they obeyed his command. "But I have spoken to you again and again; and you [do not listen] to Me." What a dramatic illustration. A tribe of pagans do what their traditional fathers told them to do; "you don't even do what I, the true and living God, tell you to do."

So you can see that drinking wine was an issue with God. It was particularly an issue if you were in leadership. You remember how in the 31st chapter of Proverbs, verse 4, we read this: "It's not for kings, O Lemuel, it's 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." People who have the well-being of a nation in their hands should not drink wine or strong drink. If somebody needs strong drink, give it to the one who is in such agony because he's in the throes of death, "And wine to him whose life is bitter." Rulers shouldn't drink. When the angel announces to Zacharias the birth of John the Baptist, he said that he will never drink wine nor strong drink all his life.

First Timothy 3:3, where it says about elders that they are not to be *paroinos*, *para oinos*—*oinos*, "wine"; *para*, "alongside." If you're an elder, you can't be alongside wine. You can't settle down at the table to drink for the same reason that a king can't drink: because he can't function with a distorted awareness. Titus 1:7 says exactly the same thing: Elders cannot be those who are alongside wine. And Titus 2:3 even says of older ladies, They're not to be those who are much enslaved to wine—very dramatic collection of words.

The point is those who are leaders, those who are spiritually responsible, mature women in the church are not to be alongside wine. They're not to settle in as drinkers. Those who are leaders, those who are arbiters, those who are mediators, those who are truth-teachers, those who have to display wisdom can't have any lack of mental clarity.

So the best choice? You ask the best choice? Well the wine they drank isn't the same; but even then, the best choice was none. The wine today is highly alcoholic, comparatively speaking. It's not the best choice at all.

So is it the same? No. Is it necessary? No. Is it the best? No. A fourth question: Is it habit-forming? I think you know the answer to that, but let me show you a scripture.

First Corinthians 6, 1 Corinthians 6:12. Paul is talking about the things that we maybe aren't commanded not to do. He says, "All things are lawful for me"—all things that are lawful are lawful if there's not a biblical prescription forbidding it. And there a lot of things like that in life, a lot of things that the Bible doesn't say are sins. "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable." The older translation was "expedient." I love the word "expedient." It's an English word that has at its core *ped*—which means "feet"—and "ex." That word literally comes from a root, a Latin root that means "to have free feet," "to not be bound up." So what he's saying is, "There are plenty of things that aren't forbidden, but they're not going to keep me free; they have the potential to bind me." And to what extent? Well the rest of the verse: "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by any." I will not be dominated by any. Why would I be dominated by something like wine?

Can it dominate you? I think you know that. I think you know the horrors of alcoholism: 38 million to 40 million, in America, known alcoholics; more all the time. It has the power to take your life and totally destroy it. Talk about homeless people. The vast majority of those people are the products of alcohol and the addition of drugs. Anything that can take control of you, anything that can make habits that make you dependent, you want to avoid because you're going to get your feet tangled. And there can be a lot of things beyond alcohol, but certainly alcohol is the point because it was dramatically connected to the false worship that's the backdrop to these passages.

So is the alcohol today the same? No. Is it necessary? No. Is it the best? No. Is it habit-forming? Yes. Is it potentially destructive? That's question number five: Is it potentially destructive?

Let's go back to Ephesians 5:18: "Don't get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation." Let me make a few more comments about the word *asōtia*.

I checked a number of lexicons, and it's a very, very—it's almost a terminal word. You might put it in the category of the word "addict." When we say someone is addicted, we mean they're unable to break the hold or the power. And that's what *asōtia* is. There are lexicons that give synonyms: "incurable," "irremediably ill," "hopelessly sick," "undisciplined." The literal meaning of *asōtia* is "one who by his manner of life debauches himself, destroys himself." This kind of inebriation leads to all kinds of transgressions, iniquities, and sins—and we understand that—as well as the destruction of the human body.

A good illustration of the usage of *asōtia* is found in Luke 15. And Luke 15 is a story of the prodigal son. And I just want to show you where that word appears in Luke 15; it's in verse 13. When the

young son who wanted his inheritance got his inheritance, verse 13 of Luke 15 says he “gathered everything together, went on a journey into a distant county, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.” “Loose living” is *asōtia*, with debauchery associated with drunkenness. But it wasn’t just debauchery associated with drunkenness because later in the 15th chapter his brother says he wasted his money “with prostitutes”—prostitutes. It’s a synonym not only for Dionysus—*asōtia* is not only the name of Dionysus, who is the god for whom the prostitutes bow down, literally, but it is also the name of that very deity, and it defines that level of debauchery. So what happened to the prodigal? He left the land of Israel in the story that Jesus made, and he went into a Gentile world, and he stepped right into the middle of paganism and debauchery with drunkenness and prostitutes.

So the question is a simple question: Is it potentially destructive? I think we all know the answer to that. You want to risk that? God warns us; we saw that in Proverbs, saw it several places: Proverbs 20, Proverbs 23, particularly in chapter 23. Isaiah condemns Judah for drunkenness. Joel condemns Judah for drunkenness. Hosea condemns Israel for drunkenness. Amos condemns Israel for drunkenness. Habakkuk condemns Babylon for drunkenness.

We all know alcoholics. We all know people who reach the level of addiction where they had to go through withdrawals and then some kind of separation with the hope that they could somehow break the power of that drink. All you have to do is drive down a street full of the homeless people, and you see its power.

So we have the questions. Can you drink today? Well first of all, is it the same as the drinking in the Scripture, when they did drink wine? No. Is it necessary? No. Is it the best? No. Is it habit-forming? Yes. Is it potentially destructive? Yes.

Number six, quickly: Is it offensive to other Christians? Is it offensive to other Christians? This is an important point, very important point, and I’ll just show you Romans 14 to make the point. First Corinthians 8:9 says you don’t want to do anything that’s a stumbling block to another brother. You don’t want to do anything that’s a stumbling block to another brother. But Romans 14, verse 21, says this: “It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.”

You have this scenario: somebody saved out of paganism, where he was in debauched life constantly. He comes to Christ. You don’t want to say to him, “Oh, by the way, now that you’re in Christ you’re free to drink.” He’s going to see that as an unholy freedom. And if you tell him that he’s free to do that, you’re going to lead him into terrible stumbling.

Influence and example is the issue here. Parents, your kids are watching. You drink in moderation, and the kids go to college and get drunk and binge drink. Fifty percent of the people in America drink; twenty-five percent of them are binge-drinking kids. You say it’s OK that you maybe have the maturity to deal with it without ever becoming inebriated; they don’t. No, you give up your liberty.

Go back to verse 15, Romans 14: “If because of food your brother is hurt”—that’s if you’re eating food offered to idols, more of that ancient worship—“you are no longer walking according to love. Don’t destroy [your brother with food] for whom Christ died. . . . Don’t 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.” Verse 20, “Don’t tear down the work of God for the sake of food”—or drink. “It’s good [for you] not to eat meat or drink wine” if it causes your brother to stumble. Somebody

saved out of that—if you had a converted alcoholic over, would you offer him wine, somebody rescued from that?

Chapter 15, Romans, verses 1 and 2 and 3: “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself.” You set aside freedoms so as you do not offend a weaker brother, another believer. You may be able to handle it. A believer seeing you do that may say, “It must be OK”; he can’t handle it, and you’ve set an example from which he may be destroyed.

So you don’t live under yourself, you don’t; you live for everybody else. That’s how it is in the Christian life. You don’t do anything that offends someone else. You don’t take those liberties; you don’t want to be responsible for the debauchery and dissolution of a life. So you set the highest possible standard.

Well let me give you two more. I will never use my liberty to offend someone else or to cause them to stumble. But, number seven, here’s the next question: Will it harm my Christian testimony? Will it harm my Christian testimony? And again, 1 Corinthians 10 is a good place to find the answer to that because it’s right at the end of the chapter. First Corinthians 10, verse 31: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.” You don’t want to offend anyone, you don’t want to harm your testimony, because that’s what comes in the next verse: “Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of many, so they may be saved.” I don’t want to do anything that’s going to cause somebody to think I’m not a believer. And if I conduct myself with alcohol the way the pagan world does, that may cause someone to be indifferent to the gospel.

And then a final question: Would it wound my conscience if I did it? You don’t want to wound your conscience. This again is Romans 14. You want your conscience to function sensitively. It’s a God-given mechanism that warns you. It’s your warning system. You don’t want to train yourself to ignore your conscience. You don’t want to have a seared conscience. You don’t want to have a scarred conscience. You don’t want to train yourself to ignore the accusing that comes out of a conscience that’s offended because you have done something against your convictions. And that’s Romans 14:23, “He who doubts is condemned if he eats.”

You can say to a person who says, “I don’t think I should drink”—you say, “Oh, you’re free in Christ, you’re free in Christ. Come on, take a drink. It’s fine; it’s not an issue.” He does that, violates his conscience. And there’s no freedom in that, there’s no freedom because “he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is”—what?—“sin.” You don’t want to train yourself to fight your conscience. You don’t want to meat eat offered to idols if that is against your conscience, in ancient times. You don’t want to drink if it’s against your conscience. That’s not going to be a liberty for you, it’s going to be a way to train your conscience into silence.

So you have the issue before you, and I hope you understand it. You can ask the question, Should I drink alcoholic beverages? And these are the questions you’d have to get past: Is it the same as biblical wine? No. Is it necessary? No. Is it the best? No. Is it habit-forming? Yes. Is it potentially destructive? Yes. Can it be offensive to another Christian and cause him to stumble? Yes. Can it be harmful to my Christian testimony? It can be, yes. And will it wound my conscience? It’s very, very

possible that it would.

Now all of that is how you look at this issue and walk wisely, right, because that's where this passage started: "Walk, not as unwise . . . but as wise." This is wisdom.

Father, again we thank You for Your truth. Thank You for Your Word, for the joy of knowing the truth and being able, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to live that truth so that we can experience the blessings that come in obedience. Seal these things to our hearts. Use us for Your glory. May we always be a savor of Christ, a savor of life to life, for Your glory, we pray. Amen.

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