

alcohol

Leader's Guide

BIG IDEA

Alcohol is a gift from God. But, it is often an abused gift. The Gospel confronts *both* the way we use alcohol to get the happiness that only God can give *and* the way we use legalistic solutions to fix alcohol abuse.

CHURCH HISTORY POP QUIZ

SAY "To begin this study we are going to take a quick Church History Pop Quiz. Let's read through all the questions first and then flip the sheet upside-down to see the answers."

JESUS CHRIST

READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER

What surprises you about the Bible's stance on alcohol?

What was the stance on alcohol that your church or family had growing up?

THE PROBLEM

LEADER READS THE SMALL SECTION UNDER "THE PROBLEM"

SAY "Now we are going to read a passage of Scripture that talks more about alcohol. Can someone with a Bible turn to Ephesians 5:15-18 and read the passage for us?"

How is being "filled with alcohol" and "filled with the Spirit" similar/different?

Similar: When you fill yourself with one of them you become *controlled* by it. It takes you over for better or for worse.

Different: When you fill yourself with alcohol you lose the ability to make good decisions. When you fill yourself with the Spirit, you can't help but do only good things.

Paul is setting up a contrast here of two different types of people. What words/phrases are associated with each side?

(see grid below)

alcohol leader's guide cont.

FIRST KIND OF PERSON	SECOND KIND OF PERSON
Wise	Unwise
Making the most of every opportunity	[Misses opportunities]
Understand what the Lord's will is	Foolish
Filled with the Spirit	Drunk on wine
[Does Good]	Debauchery

SAY "Paul is setting up a contrast of two different types of people. The first person gets wisdom, seizes the opportunities that God gives, seeks to understand what God's will is in everything, and is controlled by the Spirit which leads them to do good. The second person doesn't pursue wisdom, misses out on the opportunities God gives, is foolish, and gets drunk on wine which leads them into more sin. Paul here is associating a drunk person with words like unwise, foolishness, and debauchery. He's letting us know that alcohol abuse is not just an outward behavioral problem, but a sign that something much deeper is going on. Let's keep reading..."

THE ROOT

READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER

Growing up, in what ways have you been persuaded by the culture or the church not to drink?

Being honest, if you drink, what do you think your biggest motivation is? What about those around you?

SOLUTION

READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER

What is your initial reaction to the Gospel message above? Potential follow-up questions:

- *How will deeply knowing The Gospel above change the heart of an alcohol abuser or a legalist?*
- *What else stood out to you from this section?*

REDEEMING ALCOHOL

READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER

Which of these do you need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out more? Potential follow-up question: Which of these areas have you struggled with in the past?

SAY "Thanks for sharing. Let's spend the last few minutes in prayer."

PRAY

Pop Quiz

- 1) Was Saint Gall, a missionary to the Celts, better known for his
 - A. preaching
 - B. brewing

- 2) After Charlemagne's reign who became Europe's exclusive brewer?
 - A. the Church
 - B. the atheists

- 3) When a young Christian woman was to be married in Europe a special *bride ale* was made for her, from which we derive the word *bridal*. Who made it?
 - A. men at the pub
 - B. men at the church

- 4) Pastor John Calvin's annual salary package included upwards of 250:
 - A. gallons of wine
 - B. books for his study



JESUS CHRIST

I think that Homer Simpson speaks for a lot of people when he says, "Mmmm... beer." It appears that the early church was in agreement with him (see pop quiz). So why does it seem like the church today has a rather harsh view of alcohol?

We don't want to deny the damage that alcohol abuse has done in our world for sure. But we have to ask the question: Is Jesus, King of the Jews, also King of the brews?

Professor Daniel B. Wallace says of his research on alcohol, "As I began to look into this topic, I was actually quite amazed at the biblical writers' attitude toward alcohol. I had expected it to be far more negative than it really was. One lesson I have learned from this is that although I think that I am being biblical, often my tradition and Christian subculture shape my thinking more than I realize."

Wallace is right. The Bible says that alcohol is a gift from God. Deut 14:26 implies that it is a good thing to spend

money on and drink wine. Psalm 4:7 compares joy in the Lord to the abundance of wine. Psalm 104:14-15 credits God as the creator of wine that "makes a man's heart glad." Love is compared to wine repeatedly in the Song of Songs. Isa. 25:6 says that the Lord will prepare a banquet with wine for his people. In addition, lack of wine is viewed as a *judgment* from God (Jer. 48:33; Lam. 2:12; Hos. 2:9; Joel 1:10; Hag. 2:16); and, conversely, its provision is viewed as a *blessing* from God (Gen. 27:28; Deut. 7:13; 11:14; Joel 2:19, 24; 3:18; Amos 9:13-14).

Jesus' view and use of alcohol lines up perfectly with the the rest of the Bible. However, he was attacked by the legalists for his views. Matthew 11:19 tells us, "[Jesus] came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard.'" The religious leaders lied about Jesus' use of alcohol because they were jealous of his popularity and felt morally superior to him.

Jesus, rather than conforming to the legalists of his day, showed us that a person *can* drink to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31) without becoming a drunkard.

Our sovereign God didn't create alcohol by accident. He created it for us to drink with a joyful heart (Ecc. 9:7).

ANSWERS:
 1) Brewing. If you are going to do any significant outreach to Irish people it needs to involve a pint of something, not just good will.
 2) The Church.
 3) Trick question. Those are the same guys.
 4) 250 gallons of wine.



What surprises you about the Bible's stance on alcohol?

What was the stance on alcohol that your church or family had growing up?

alcohol is a gift

the problem

Alcohol is a gift from God, but it is often an **abused gift**. Here are some of the tragic consequences of alcohol abuse:

Incest (Gen 19:32–35), Violence (Prov 4:17), Adultery (Rev 17:2), Mockery (Prov 20:1), Poverty (Prov 21:17), Murder (2 Sam 11:13–15), Gluttony (Prov 23:20–21), Madness (Jer 51:7), Sloth (Joel 1:5), Escapism (Hos 4:11), Depression (Luke 24:34).

Read

Ephesians 5:15–18

How is being “filled with alcohol” and “filled with the Spirit” similar/different?

Paul is setting up a contrast here of two different types of people. What words/phrases are associated with each side?

THE ROOT ISSUE

Since the gift of alcohol had been so heavily abused in the city of Ephesus, the Apostle Paul did not want them to take this problem lightly (and neither should we). Therefore, he commands them to be the kind of people who don't abuse alcohol. But doing this is easier said than done.

Some people would argue that we have been presented with two main solutions - both of which have their limitations because they use fear as their primary weapon.

The first solution (used mainly by the secular culture) seeks to induce fear by showing you all the statistics and consequences of alcohol abuse. The education system is full of programs that teach you about the dangers of alcohol (D.A.R.E., mock car accidents, risk management seminars, etc.) to deter you from wanting to binge drink. Using consequences to deter bad choices is biblical (see book of Proverbs), but we all know that this has only worked on a small percentage of the student population.

The second solution (used mainly by church people) seeks to induce fear by telling you that if you drink God will disapprove of you. Therefore, you should get as far away from alcohol as possible. But is abstaining really the best solution?

“Do you suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the object which is abused? Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall we then prohibit and abolish women?”

- Martin Luther

Luther is right. Getting rid of the object won't cure the need behind the object. The problem isn't “out there.” The problem is “in our heart.” For instance, if you take away alcohol from a guy who desperately needs approval from his friends, he will just turn to something else like having a nice car to get the approval he wants. Therefore, we must find out *why* we (or our friends) drink before we move on to a solution that will get better traction. Here are a few of the common *root* issues that drive someone to drink:

Approval and appreciation. “If I drink with this person I can finally get their acceptance” or “I usually follow the rules, but I'm willing to break the law this time with alcohol because I need this group's approval.”

Influence and Power. “Drinking will give me more influence with this crowd.”

Emotional and physical comfort. “Getting drunk helps me to numb the pain, get rid of stress, or escape the problems in my life.”

Control. “If I can get him/her drunk maybe they will want to make out with me or have sex with me” or “If I get myself drunk maybe it will turn me into a more likable or outgoing person.”

It is important to point out that everyone abuses alcohol for a different reason. Identifying the root reason will *help* in the recovery process. But, knowing the root reason won't actually *cure* us. What we need is something stronger, deeper, and more powerful than alcohol to fulfill us. If we want to be released from the power that alcohol has over us, we need to go somewhere else for true freedom and happiness.

Growing up, in what ways have you been persuaded by the culture or the church not to drink?

Being honest, if you drink, what do you think your biggest motivation is? What about those around you?

solution

The Gospel confronts the way we use alcohol to get happiness. The more we drink to find comfort, the more uncomfortable our hangover is. The more we drink to get approval, the more we feel unapproved of in the morning after the regret sets in.

Only in Jesus will we get the happiness that we long for, without all the side effects. And only when we realize that all the things we are looking for in alcohol can be found in Jesus, will we be freed to enjoy alcohol the way God intended. We have all been guilty of slipping toward legalism or drunkenness at some point in our life. But here's the good news.

Jesus lived the life we should have lived - a life without legalism and drunkenness. And instead of coming to condemn a world full of drunks and legalists, he died to save it (John 3:17).

Jesus is not a cosmic killjoy as many have thought. His very first miracle was turning over 100 gallons of water into wine at a wedding party. Pastor Tim Keller mentions that in the same way Jesus saved the wedding party from a disappointing end, he will also save you and the rest of the world from a disappointing end. Jesus died to keep the party going! His *sad* death has made it possible for us to have a *happy*, eternal life.

And one day very soon, Jesus promises that those of us who are his, who have been filled with his Spirit (Eph 5:18), will enjoy a drink together with him. The very night before Jesus died he said, "I tell you I will not drink again until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom."

Isaiah also points us to the future Feast: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine... He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces..."
- Isaiah 25:6-9

The feast in heaven will be filled not with those who have made the gift of alcohol ultimate, but with those who have made Jesus ultimate and use alcohol as a way to heighten our fellowship with him.

What is your initial reaction to the Gospel message above?

redeeming alcohol:

You can't **redeem** alcohol without being redeemed yourself. So the first step is to trust in Jesus, who lived a perfect life and died to make you righteous before God (2 Cor 5:21). Those who are made righteous by God are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13), who empowers you with the motivation and ability to redeem *alcohol* in the following ways:

respect authority

God desires that we would respect authority, for our good and the good of our nation. Our country has created a legal drinking age because many teens think, "I can drink responsibly." But we all know that this hasn't been the case. Thus, if you are under the drinking age, you shouldn't drink. Romans 13:1 says, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." This Bible study is intended for you to enjoy alcohol to the glory of God, but not at the expense of minimizing His glory by being unsubmitive to the law.

use your conscience

If you are over 21, act according to your conscience. If you have abused alcohol in the past, you might want to abstain for a period of time so that you don't stumble back into your old habits. If you know that you don't have the willpower to have just one or two, or if alcohol has led you down a path of sin before, hold off.

don't judge

If you are over 21, Romans 14 tells those of you who have chosen to *abstain* not to judge your friends who don't. The passage also exhorts the Christians who *don't abstain* not to judge their friends who do.

respect others

If you are over 21, 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 says that you should seek the good of others and not cause anyone to stumble. Ask yourself before hanging out with friends or going to a party: How will this affect the faith of those around me? Does anyone have alcohol-related conscience or addiction issues? Instead of flaunting your freedom, walk with wisdom, discernment, and humility.

Which of these do you need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out more?