

To Drink or not to Drink (Part 2)

Alcohol advertising today masterfully highlights pleasure, success, and lifestyle through emotionally charged storytelling, humour, and aspiration. These ads blur the line between fantasy and reality, shaping perceptions—especially among the impressionable—and rarely reveal the dangers. That’s why the Church must speak up. With over 90 biblical warnings on alcohol abuse, it’s our duty to expose the full picture and be salt and light in a crooked world.

To influence culture, we must understand its patterns while remaining rooted in Kingdom truth. In South Africa, various proposals have been made to curb alcohol advertising—restricting ads to adult media, banning them near schools and churches, and limiting sponsorships. One major bill even sought a total ban outside points of sale. Yet, under industry pressure, these efforts have stalled.

Meanwhile, the alcohol industry thrives—R156 billion in 2023—with premium products like the Platinum Honor Cognac retailing for nearly R1,000 a bottle. There’s clearly a money trail. Strikingly, substances like nicotine and cannabis face tight advertising restrictions, yet alcohol remains largely unregulated in this space. The recent public pushback against a cannabis product ban shows that people do have power. So we must ask: if nicotine and cannabis are restricted, why is alcohol still freely promoted?

Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV) 13 *“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Jesus summed up this thinking when He was praying for His disciples in **John 17:15-18 (NIV) 15** *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.*

Do Not Conform, But Transform. The World has a pattern that’s different to the Kingdom of God.

Romans 12:2 (NIV) *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

The goal of this message is to increase our understanding of the driving forces behind the drinking culture in our nation, and to be equipped with tools for dealing with it. This is both for ourselves and also those we are influencing and discipling.

Colossians 4:5-6 (NIV) 5 *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Philippians 2:14-15 (NIV) 14 *Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.*

How are you shining in the world? Examine your attitude and behaviour with regards to drinking, what makes you shine?

8 Different words used in NT to describe drunkenness. They are summarized in this table.

Greek Word	Meaning	Focus	Example Reference
μέθη (méthē)	Drunkenness (state)	Condition	Gal. 5:21, Rom. 13:13
μέθυσος (méthysos)	Drunkard (person)	Habitual drunk	1 Cor. 6:10
οίνοφλυγία (oinophlygia)	Excessive wine drinking	Addiction, craving	1 Pet. 4:3
οίνοφλύαξ (oinophlýax)	Wine-bibber	Glutton for wine	Titus 1:7
παροῖνος (paroínos)	Given to wine; brawler	Drunken violence	1 Tim. 3:3, Titus 1:7
νήφω (néphō)	To be sober	Sobriety (positive command)	1 Pet. 5:8, 1 Thess. 5:6
βαρυνθῶσω (barynthōsin)	Weighed down	Emotional/spiritual dullness	Luke 21:34
κῶμος (kōmos)	Revelry, drunken parties	Immoral celebration	Rom. 13:13, 1 Pet. 4:3

The risks associated with alcohol have gone to another level in modern society. For example, in Jesus' day they walked whilst today we drive. Today we use medicines which can interact with alcohol in a harmful way. I will include this information below to show you how common medicines today can have very harmful consequences to interaction with alcohol (Painkillers, Cough Medicines, Diabetic Medication, Psychiatric medicines, Cardiovascular medicines e.g. Warfarin can increase blood clotting or bleeding when mixed with alcohol etc). *For more information on specific common medications that interact harmfully with alcohol see Appendix 1 below.* There is another way in which the next generation is being affected by Alcohol. It is when alcohol interacts with pregnancy. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD leads to lifelong challenges, including cognitive impairments, behavioural issues, and social difficulties. South Africa has the highest reported prevalence of FASD globally, with rates varying significantly across regions. **National Average:** A 2023 report highlighted a national average of **111.1 per 1,000**, or about **11%** of the population. A contributing factor was the “dop” system where farm workers were paid partly in alcohol. There is also lack of awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol use during pregnancy. **There is no known safe amount or safe time to drink during pregnancy.** The **first trimester**, especially **weeks 3–8**, is a critical period because it includes **organ and brain development** — alcohol exposure during this time can cause **serious structural defects**, including facial abnormalities and central nervous system damage. *For more information on FASD please see Appendix 2 below.*

Let's start off by examining the status quo in our nation.

1. What is the Impact of Alcohol abuse in South Africa today?

1. High Per Capita Alcohol Consumption:

South African drinkers consume an average of 29.9 litres of pure alcohol per capita annually, placing them among the highest consumers globally.

2. Heavy Episodic Drinking:

Approximately 59% of South African drinkers engage in heavy episodic drinking, defined as consuming at least 60 grams or more of pure alcohol on a single occasion in the past 30 days. This means that the next generation is not witnessing many people modelling light drinking.

3. Alcohol-Related Mortality:

Approximately 62,300 premature deaths are attributed to alcohol consumption in South Africa each year. This is 10% of all the deaths. Festive Season 2023/2024: Over 1,600 people died on South African roads during this period, with nearly one-third of these fatalities involving alcohol as a significant factor. Wisdom is judged by her fruit. Look at the results. Global Ranking: South Africa has been reported as the number one country for alcohol-related road deaths, highlighting the severity of the issue. **South Africa has a road traffic death rate of 39.7 per 100,000 people annually, double the global rate, with an estimated 40% of these deaths involving pedestrians who had blood-alcohol levels above the legal limit.** High Proportion of Alcohol-Related Fatalities: Research indicates that approximately 50% of individuals who die on South African roads have a blood alcohol concentration exceeding the legal limit of 0.05 grams per 100 millilitres.

4. Youth Mortality

Alcohol is implicated in approximately 80% of male youth deaths in South Africa, highlighting its significant impact on younger populations.

5. Underage Drinking and Associated Risks:

There is a growing trend of underage drinking in South Africa, particularly during "pens down" parties celebrating the end of exams. In June 2022, 21 children died at a tavern in East London during such a party, with the youngest victim being only 13 years old.

6. Treatment Admissions:

In the second half of 2021, alcohol was the primary substance of abuse for 20% to 28% of individuals admitted to treatment centres across various provinces in South Africa.

7. Economic Impact:

The harmful use of alcohol results in significant economic costs due to healthcare expenses, lost productivity, and law enforcement resources. While specific figures for South Africa are not provided, globally, these costs are substantial. These facts underscore the significant public health challenge posed by alcohol abuse in South Africa. I see this with the stories I am told by leaders I coach in the workplace. It is difficult to even fire people for these things in South Africa. There is **Up to 21 working days** of special leave for rehabilitation from substance abuse. This leave is **granted only once** within a **36-month period**.

8. Domestic Violence:

Alcohol abuse is identified as a primary cause of domestic violence in South Africa, with 25% of respondents in a survey citing it as the main factor. High Incidence in Rural Areas: In rural areas of the South-Western Cape, 76% of domestic violence cases were found to be alcohol-related.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Alcohol. The President of South Africa has highlighted the urgent need to re-examine the role of alcohol abuse in violent and reckless behaviour, deeming GBV as the country's second pandemic.

Injury-Induced Mortality: Studies indicate that alcohol bans in South Africa led to a **14% reduction** in injury-induced mortality, underscoring the link between alcohol consumption and fatal injuries. Homicides decreased by 21%, assaults by 33% and reported rape cases by 19%. These findings indicate a tight link between alcohol and aggressive behaviour and align with existing evidence connecting alcohol consumption to violence (Darke 2010, Kuhns et al. 2011, 2014). Alcohol control regulation may therefore be an effective policy in contexts with high rates of violence.

These stats should concern all of us deeply. We have a responsibility to address these issues as they emerge in our sphere of influence. **The measure of our spirituality is seen more by how we interface with the world than how we show up on Sunday.**

9. Deceptive advertising strategies

The deceptive nature of advertising undermines education and public health messaging.

1. Glamorization and Lifestyle Association

Ads often associate alcohol with success, wealth, popularity, and attractiveness, which can mislead consumers into believing that drinking will enhance their social status. The campaigns frequently feature aspirational settings, like luxury parties or exotic locations, that are out of touch with the everyday reality of most South Africans.

2. Targeting Vulnerable Populations

Despite regulations, alcohol ads often indirectly target youth through music, social media influencers, and sports sponsorships. Townships and poorer communities are flooded with outdoor alcohol advertising, reinforcing alcohol as a cultural norm and coping mechanism.

3. Underplaying Health and Social Risks

Advertisements rarely mention the negative health effects of alcohol—such as liver disease, cancer, or mental health issues. The link between alcohol and domestic violence, drunk driving, and crime is also absent from advertising narratives. "Drink responsibly" disclaimers are often token gestures with minimal visibility or impact.

4. Misrepresentation of Drinking Norms

Ads create the illusion that heavy or frequent drinking is normal or fun, reinforcing binge drinking culture. They distort social norms by making it seem like everyone drinks, all the time, leaving little space for sober lifestyles.

5. Exploiting Regulatory Gaps

Despite self-regulatory codes, companies often exploit loopholes or operate in a grey area to bypass restrictions. Social media platforms, in particular, are poorly regulated, making them a major channel for unfiltered alcohol promotion.

6. Cultural Manipulation

Advertisers co-opt local language, music, and identity symbols to make alcohol seem more culturally acceptable and relevant. This strategy embeds alcohol deeper into cultural and social rituals, especially among young adults.

There is therefore a call for Policy and Advocacy Considerations. Public health advocates argue for stricter regulation or a total ban on alcohol advertising, similar to tobacco. Stronger enforcement, especially on digital platforms, and counter-advertising campaigns may be necessary. There is a need for corporate accountability, transparency, and ethical advertising practices.

Appendix 1 – Common Medications that interact harmfully with Alcohol

Many common medications can interact harmfully with alcohol, leading to increased side effects, reduced effectiveness, or serious health risks. Here are some of the most commonly used types of medications with known alcohol interactions:

1. Pain Relievers

- **Acetaminophen (Tylenol)**: Increases risk of **liver damage**.
 - **NSAIDs (e.g., ibuprofen, naproxen)**: Heightens risk of **stomach bleeding, ulcers, and kidney problems**.
 - **Opioids (e.g., codeine, oxycodone, morphine)**: Dangerous **sedation, respiratory depression, and overdose risk**.
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2. Anxiety, Sleep, and Psychiatric Medications

- **Benzodiazepines (e.g., diazepam, lorazepam, alprazolam)**: Intensifies **sedation, drowsiness, and respiratory suppression**.
 - **Sleep medications (e.g., zolpidem/Ambien)**: Increases risk of **sleepwalking**, memory loss, and impaired motor function.
 - **Antidepressants (e.g., SSRIs, TCAs, MAOIs)**:
 - Can worsen **depression**.
 - Risk of **hypertensive crisis** with MAOIs (e.g., phenelzine).
 - Heightens **sedation** with tricyclics.
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3. Antihistamines (Allergy Meds)

- **Diphenhydramine (Benadryl), chlorpheniramine, hydroxyzine**: Amplifies **drowsiness, dizziness, and impaired coordination**.
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4. Diabetes Medications

- **Insulin and oral hypoglycaemics (e.g., metformin, sulfonylureas)**: Alcohol can cause **dangerously low blood sugar**.
 - **Metformin**: Rare risk of **lactic acidosis** increases with heavy alcohol use.
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5. Antibiotics

- **Metronidazole (Flagyl), tinidazole, sulfamethoxazole-trimethoprim (Bactrim)**: Can cause **severe nausea, vomiting, flushing, and rapid heartbeat** (disulfiram-like reaction).

- **Linezolid:** Risk of **serotonin syndrome** or **blood pressure spikes**.
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6. Cardiovascular Medications

- **Nitrates (e.g., nitro-glycerine):** Risk of **severe drop in blood pressure**.
 - **Beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers:** Alcohol may increase **dizziness and fainting**.
 - **Warfarin (Coumadin):** Alcohol affects **blood clotting**, increasing risk of **bleeding or clotting**.
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7. Anti-seizure Medications

- **Phenytoin, carbamazepine, valproic acid:** Alcohol reduces effectiveness and increases **side effects** or **seizure risk**.
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8. Cough and Cold Medications

- Many contain **alcohol or sedating ingredients:** Combining with more alcohol increases **drowsiness** and **overdose risk**.

Appendix 2 – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a group of conditions that occur in a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. It affects physical, behavioural, and cognitive development, and symptoms can range from mild to severe.

Cognitive and Learning Difficulties

- Poor memory
 - Difficulty with attention and concentration
 - Trouble understanding cause and effect
 - Learning disabilities (e.g., reading, math)
 - Lower IQ or developmental delays
 - Difficulty with abstract concepts (e.g., time, money)
 - Poor problem-solving and judgment
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Physical Symptoms

- Distinctive facial features:
 - Smooth philtrum (area between nose and upper lip)
 - Thin upper lip
 - Small eye openings (short palpebral fissures)
 - Low birth weight and height
 - Small head size (microcephaly)
 - Poor coordination and balance
 - Delayed growth
 - Hearing or vision problems
 - Heart, kidney, or bone defects
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Behavioral and Emotional Issues

- Poor impulse control
- Hyperactivity and restlessness (similar to ADHD)
- Social difficulties (trouble understanding social cues)
- Mood swings or irritability

- Poor adaptability to change
 - Inappropriate behaviour (especially with strangers)
 - Risk-taking or delinquent behaviour
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Lifelong Impacts

- Difficulty maintaining employment or independence in adulthood
 - Trouble with the law or authority
 - Substance abuse or mental health disorders
 - Difficulty parenting or forming relationships
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FASD is **not curable**, but early diagnosis, supportive education, stable home environments, and professional intervention (e.g., speech therapy, counselling, occupational therapy) can significantly improve outcomes.