

## To Drink or not to Drink

*Ephesians 5:18 – "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."*

**Drunkenness** refers to the state of being **intoxicated** or **impaired** due to the consumption of alcohol or other intoxicating substances. It occurs when the **Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)** reaches a level that significantly affects physical and mental functions. The effects of drunkenness vary depending on the individual, the amount of alcohol consumed, and the person's tolerance, but it generally involves a **loss of coordination, impaired judgment, and altered behaviour**. This scripture is powerful because it emphasizes that the goal is not just to avoid drunkenness but to pursue the alternative. This is the great displacement. I want to be filled with the Spirit. I want to be led by the Spirit. I desire to be emboldened by God's spirit and not any other spirit. I want to be dependent on His Spirit and no other. Both the phrases "get drunk on wine" and "be filled with the Spirit" are in present continuous tense. So these are ongoing experiences. Instead of continually getting drunk, continually be filled with the Spirit. It's the present passive imperative; keep being filled with the Spirit. This scripture also shows that drunkenness leads to debauchery. Debauchery is dissipation, reckless living, wastefulness, excess, and moral ruin. It's the same word used to describe the prodigal son. The verse contrasts worldly intoxication with spiritual saturation. We know that excessive drinking also leads to other things which we will talk about in this message.

## The Link with EQ God's Way

It is appropriate that we are discussing this topic in the middle of the series EQ God's way. Although it's a standalone one, it has been confirmed in research that individuals with higher EQ are better at managing emotions, handling stress, and making healthier decisions, which reduces the likelihood of using alcohol as a coping mechanism. People with high EQ may have better impulse control and are less likely to engage in risky drinking behaviours. Research suggests that high self-awareness and emotional regulation correlate with lower alcohol dependence. Another piece of research showed that people with low emotional regulation and poor coping mechanisms are more likely to use alcohol as an escape from stress or emotional distress. Having said this, a 2019 study found that high social EQ (e.g., strong interpersonal skills) can be associated with higher alcohol consumption in certain cultures where drinking is normalized. I believe this could be more closely associated with the misapplication and overuse of extraverted tendencies which we will discuss in another message. All of this shows us that we cannot study topics in isolation but strengths and weaknesses in one area have an impact on other areas.

## The Challenge of this Topic

It is often easier to preach on subjects that the bible is very clear about in terms of right and wrong. For example, when it comes to adultery there is no debate about it for believers. However, the topic of drinking has different cultural and theological positions. It appears to be discouraged in some verses and endorsed in others. It is therefore important to thoroughly examine scripture, applying mature hermeneutical principles whilst taking into consideration the social context and ancient practices of the time. We are therefore studying a contemporary challenge in its historical and theological context. With these topics it is often best to focus on what is the wisest thing to do as opposed to merely right and wrong. The Bible is clear that there are many things that are permissible, but not all are beneficial.

*“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive.— 1 Corinthians 10:23 (NIV)*

## **1. Which groups of people is this message intended for?**

This message also presents another challenge; my hearers are a very mixed crowd.

- 1. Those who do not drink because they believe it is sinful, and the Bible is against it.** They have not necessarily studied it for themselves, but this is the church culture they grew up in or are currently still in. They tend to be quite judgmental if they see someone drinking and struggle to receive from that person.
- 2. Those who do not drink based on personal conviction.** Some have had bad experiences in their past, perhaps they were heavy drinkers. They know it is bad for them and have seen the fruit thereof. Others have witnessed the abuse of alcohol in their families and communities and are repulsed by it. They were never exposed to light drinking. Some feel this conviction based on the example they want to set. Research has found that parents are the primary influencers of whether their children end up drinking or not. Studies consistently find that adolescents who start drinking alcohol at an early age are at a significantly higher risk of developing alcohol use disorders (AUDs) or engaging in heavy drinking behaviour later in life.
- 3. Those who do not drink because of social inclusion and branding.** Some are not opposed to it but have come from a background or even church culture where it is not the done thing. It is seen as sinful by others. These people do not drink because it affects their brand with those they desire to be validated and included by. It's similar to smoking. In certain cultures, it is often seen negatively when a woman smokes. Even with alcohol there are certain drinks that are viewed as more lady like.
- 4. Those who do not drink for health reasons.** For some it might be to protect their liver whilst for others it is purely to do with weight loss.
- 5. Those who do not drink but are codependent.** They are in relationship with alcoholics and heavy drinkers and directly impacted by their habits.
- 6. Those who do not drink simply because they are underage.** They are not allowed to drink. Some of them can't wait to be of age to drink. I would caution those of you in this category not to experiment. I am in full support of the Liquor Amendment Act where one of the things proposed is to change the legal limit so that it is raised from 18 to 21 years old like in USA. In South Africa we have so many accidents and fatalities due to young people drinking and driving. They start driving the same time they are allowed alcohol. Zimmerman et al. (2010) examined how family drinking patterns and parental guidance can influence adolescents. While moderate parental drinking may sometimes serve as a model for controlled alcohol use, children are also more likely to adopt heavy drinking behaviours when exposed to frequent drinking or permissive attitudes toward alcohol.
- 7. Those who are light drinkers.** For example, they only drink on social occasions when they have to toast in celebration of something.
- 8. Those who are moderate drinkers.** On days that they drink they don't drink more than one or two drinks. In the USA, The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) advises that while various factors come into play “genes are responsible for about half of the risk for alcoholism.” The moderate drinker is naïve not to recognize the peril of addiction for themselves

or those they influence. No one sets out to be an alcoholic. Unfortunately, there is no objective standard or even specific scripture that defines moderate drinking. With uncertain knowledge of one's tolerance for alcohol, one may easily move from being a moderate to excessive drinker. Reportedly, 51 percent of American adults drink regularly and more than thirty eight million binge drink about four times a month<sup>20</sup> (not counting the rapidly growing population of underage drinkers). Few, if any, set out to be problem drinkers but alcohol consumption can indeed be a slippery slope. A common experience for moderate drinkers is that they feel fine when they are seated but when they stand up and try to walk, let alone drive, it is indeed a different story. The sad thing for them is that those around them can see the difference. Sometimes we smell what's coming from their lungs. We see the mood change. There's no universal standard for what moderate is. The legal limit for drunkenness is a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05 for drivers in this country but aspects of impairment can happen with a BAC as low as 0.02. This legal limit means a driver's blood alcohol concentration should not exceed 0.05 grams of alcohol per 100 milliliters of blood. For Drivers of Minibus Taxis or Vehicles Carrying Passengers the BAC limit: 0.00%. This is a zero-tolerance policy for professional drivers operating vehicles with passengers. Some people act like drinking too much it's the same as eating too much when it comes to overall impact the dynamic is very different. Most normal people would rather have a fat driver driving them somewhere than a drunk one.

9. **Those who are binge drinkers or heavy drinkers.** Binge drinking or heavy episodic drinking is drinking alcoholic beverages with the intention of becoming intoxicated by heavy consumption of alcohol over a short period of time. Recently I asked people in one of my workshops what they do on a monthly basis to top themselves up. Some people spoke about things that they do to refresh themselves and to relax whilst one gentleman told us that he intentionally drinks to get drunk and properly drunk. They deceive themselves into thinking they don't have a problem because they can go for many days without drinking. Heavy drinking for men is more than 5 drinks on an occasion and more than 15 in a given week, whilst for women it is 4 or more on an occasion and more than 14 in a week. This is not an exact science and it is very subjective as people are impacted differently by alcohol.

*Isaiah 5:11 – "Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine."*

**This is a warning against excessive drinking from morning to night.**

10. **Those who are Alcoholics.** This is Alcoholic Use Disorder (AUD). This condition is characterized by compulsive alcohol use. It is a medical condition where an individual struggles to control their drinking even when it affects their health safety and relationships. The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center points out, "Alcoholism is not defined by what you drink, when you drink it, or even how much you drink. It's the effects of your drinking that define a problem."<sup>17</sup> One person may use alcohol many times with seemingly no ill effects; another may overdose or become addicted after only a few drinks. A study published in 2022 reported that 9.6% of South Africans aged 15 years and older had an AUD. We can by inference calculate that based on this, approximately 19.2% of the drinking population in South Africa may have Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). This is because 40 -50% of South African adults are regular drinkers. Now imagine I had

a new restaurant and invited you stating that 20% of the people who eat here end up with food poisoning, would you eat?

The challenge with all these types of drinking is that the driving force often differs. There are four types of drinkers each with different motivations, this includes the social drinker, the conformity drinker, the enhancement drinker and the coping drinker. It is important that as believers we have a message for all these categories that I've covered. For too long we have created this false dichotomy between those who drink and those who don't. For us to be effective in discipling people, we need to be able to speak into all of these categories.

We will discuss some stats later but in the meantime let's be aware that alcohol plays a significant role in 75% of homicides, 60% of car accidents and 24% of vehicle related deaths and injuries.

## **2. What does a thorough word study of alcohol and wine in the Bible teach us?**

11 different words in Hebrew are translated as wine. Seven of them are only used once. Two are used about five times each. The two most common are **Yayin (138 times)** and **Tirosh (38 times)**, which typically refers to new wine, less fermented or unfermented wine. One has to look at the context to understand the meaning. Yayin was a common drink for refreshment and denotes fermented wine and is associated with intoxication. Yayin was forbidden for Nazarites and priests while serving in the Tabernacle. On the other hand, Tirosh was new wine or grape juice. Tirosh in Hosea 4:11 is paired with Yayin and appears to be treated as Yayin. A third Hebrew word is **Shekhar (22 times)** and is translated strong drink or beer. Remember that in those days they had barley beer and date beer these were other alcoholic beverages differentiated from wine Deuteronomy 14:26 is sometimes used to support the consumption of Shekhar but the weight of the scripture suggests that it is actually poured out as a drink offering. Imagine a few litres of alcoholic beverage poured onto a hot altar which already had a burnt animal offering and grain offering. The smell would be a sweet aroma.

In the Greek language the word **Oinos (34 times)**. Oinos neos speaks of New wine which is unfermented grape juice.

The use of the word wine, strong drink in scripture has this spread:

Type of Reference	Count	Description
Positive/Neutral (non-ceremonial)	110	Joy, blessing, marriage, health, hospitality
Negative (warnings, misuse)	90	Drunkenness, moral failure, leadership cautions
Ceremonial/Neutral	30–40	Drink offerings, temple rituals

## **3. What was the cultural and historical context of alcohol in ancient times?**

*"He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him."— Luke 10:34 (NIV)*

**Use of Wine (yayin) for medical treatment** — Wine had antiseptic properties in the ancient world and was often used to cleanse wounds. The Samaritan applies **oil and wine** to soothe and disinfect the injured man's wounds. Today we have disinfectants like Dettol or Savlon for that.

**1 Timothy 5:23 "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses."**

Paul encourages Timothy to use a **small amount of wine** as a remedy for digestive issues or other

recurring illnesses.  **Practical implication:** A measured, intentional use of wine for health, not for indulgence. Wine, especially red wine, is often associated with promoting digestion and alleviating discomfort like indigestion or gastritis. Today we can take antacids, probiotics, laxatives, H2 Blockers, antispasmodics to stop cramping etc

**Proverbs 31:6–7** "Give strong drink (shekhar) 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."

It is important to understand the cultural and historical context of the use of wine and strong drink. Some people use scriptures like these to justify the use of alcohol but remember that there is no need for this with modern medicine. Alcohol was used for medicinal purposes. There are less dangerous things that can be used today. The scripture above is suggesting its use for depression but how many of you would suggest this for someone when they can take anti-depressants? This scripture is stated straight after he has said wine is not for kings. It is a statement of contrast.

**Matthew 27:34 (NIV):** "There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it."

**Mark 15:23 (NIV):** "Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it."

This was likely a **narcotic mixture**, intended to dull pain. Jesus **refuses** it, possibly choosing to face suffering fully aware. It's interesting that Jesus had already made this statement earlier. *Matthew 26:29 (NIV): "I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* In John's account it does say He drank the vinegar wine. Perhaps because He drank just a little bit it could have been seen as not drinking it or refusing to.

The alcohol content of wine in Jesus' time (1st century CE) was likely between **4% and 10% ABV (alcohol by volume)**. ABV tells you what portion of the total liquid is pure alcohol. If you compare this to modern breweries a lot of wines are between 12 and 20% alcohol. Your fortified wines like Port, are between 18 and 24% and a lot of your hard liquors are between 40% and 60%. Most people today drink bourbon or tequila at their full strength or with minimal dilution (like a few drops of water or ice). This is 35 – 45% alcohol undiluted for the most part. Distillation that produces beverages of 40% alcohol and more was only from the Middle Ages. When we examine the relatively low alcohol content in ancient times, several historical and scientific factors suggest this range:

1. **Ancient Fermentation Methods** – Without modern winemaking techniques (like controlled fermentation or fortification), the alcohol content of ancient wine depended on natural yeast fermentation. Wild yeasts typically produce wines in the **5–10% ABV range**, with some exceptions.
2. **Dilution Practices** – Historical sources, such as Greek and Roman writings, indicate that wine was often diluted with water (sometimes in a 1:3 or even 1:10 ratio) to make it more suitable for daily consumption. This would further reduce its effective alcohol content. Wine was often diluted with water in ancient times. It was common to mix wine with water to make it more palatable and less intoxicating. This was also a cultural practice that made wine safer to drink, as water sources were often contaminated. It's important to note that drinking unmixed wine was seen as barbaric in Greek culture with typical dilution of one to three in Bible times it means the alcohol content would have ranged from 2 – 2.75% alcohol. Today's legal standards the drink has to be above 0.5% alcohol before it is classified as an alcoholic beverage therefore if we are to compare apples with apples the wine that was likely to have been drunk in Jesus's days would

have been their equivalent or slightly less alcohol content of a Castle Light which is 2.5% alcohol.

3. **Grape Varieties & Climate** – The grapes used in biblical times likely had lower sugar content than modern cultivated varieties, leading to lower potential alcohol levels.
4. **Preservation Methods** – Without modern bottling or refrigeration, wines could turn into vinegar (acetification) or spoil more easily, meaning fresh wine was preferred.
5. **Ancient Writings & Practices** – The Jewish Talmud and Greco-Roman texts describe wine as both a social and sacred beverage, with strong wine often associated with intoxication and watered-down wine being the norm for daily use.

Thus, while undiluted biblical-era wine could have been as strong as **8-10% ABV**, its everyday consumption was likely at a much lower level due to widespread dilution.

#### **4. What does the Bible say about the consumption of alcohol?**

##### **A. Excessive drinking is associated with the old life**

**1 Peter 4:3** – *"For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry."*

##### **B. Excessive drinking has severe negative consequences**

*Proverbs 20:1 – "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise."*

Here, yayin (wine) and shekhar (strong drink, translated as "beer" in the NIV) are distinguished, emphasizing the dangers of both.

*Isaiah 5:11 – "Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine."*

*Isaiah 5:22 – "Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks."*

Woe is a strong word of denunciation and warning in scripture. These verses show us that there are severe consequences to the abuse of alcohol. It makes reference to both Yayin and Shekhar (probably referring to date or barley beer). An ancient practice was that they would mix them with water or spices.

##### **C. Drunkenness appears to result in exclusion from the Kingdom in one form or another**

**1 Corinthians 6:10** – *"Nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."*

**Galatians 5:19-21** – *"The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

**Romans 13:13** – *"Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy."*

**Luke 21:34** – "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap."

We see both Jesus and Paul giving stern warnings about drunkenness.

#### **D. Heavy drinking dulls one's understanding**

**1 Samuel 25:36-37** – "When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until daybreak. Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone."

**Hosea 4:11** – "To prostitution, old wine and new wine take away their understanding."

#### **E. Heavy drinking can lead to shame**

**Genesis 9:20-21** – "Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent." (Noah's drunkenness led to shame.)

**Genesis 19:32-36** 32 Let's get our father to drink wine and then sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father."33 That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and slept with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up. 34 The next day the older daughter said to the younger, "Last night I slept with my father. Let's get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and sleep with him so we can preserve our family line through our father." 35 So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went in and slept with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up. 36 So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father.

Lot's daughters got him drunk to commit incest. This is still happening today, usually men spiking women's drinks. Many people will talk about sexual encounters that only occurred when they were under the influence of alcohol.

**Habakkuk 2:15** – "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbours, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies!"

Such practices are condemned by God.

#### **F. The Bible highlights the deceptive nature of alcohol and it's destructive end**

**Proverbs 23:29-35** "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper."

#### **G. The Bible cautions us to not associate with drunkards**

**Proverbs 23:20-21** – "Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags."

You save a lot of money when you don't drink. Many can't afford their drinking habits.

**1 Corinthians 5:11** – "But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people."

**Deuteronomy 29:6** – "You ate no bread and drank no wine or other fermented drink. I did this so that you might know that I am the Lord your God."

(God's people were kept from alcohol to remain focused on Him.)

#### **H. The Bible warns against false prophets who promote indulgence**

**Micah 2:11** – "If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' that would be just the prophet for this people!"

#### **I. Drunkenness is associated with rebellion amongst youth**

**Deuteronomy 21:18-21** 18 If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, 19 his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. 20 They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard." 21 Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

#### **J. Leaders are warned sternly with regards to alcohol consumption**

**Titus 1:7** – "Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain."

**Titus 2:3** – "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good."

**Proverbs 31:4-5** – "It is not for kings, Lemuel—it is not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights."

In part 2 of this message, we will explore the statistics of alcohol related issues in South Africa today. We will also look at the advertising and commercial aspects of the drinking culture and the organisations behind it. We will also address light and moderate drinkers with regards to some guard rails that can keep them light drinkers. I will also give tools for those who are codependents living with alcoholics. We will also examine the signs of excessive drinking and alcoholism.

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