

Part 32: How To See Alcohol Clearly

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If you have been at Sovereign Hope for a considerable period of time you will have probably noticed three key areas in which the Bible shapes our culture, our life and our mission as a church.

Theologically, we are conservative and reformed. That is to say that we believe in the inerrancy and the authority of scripture and the sovereignty of God to save. In other words we are people who constantly look back at God's word before we look out into our lives and into our culture.

Culturally and missionally, we are evangelical. While it may seem like only a political term today, what we mean when we say "evangelical" is that we believe in the power of the gospel to save the lost, and that what we believe about God in private should shape how we live and interact in public. We find these up in Jesus' Great Commission to his church in the gospels.

As part of that mission, we are a baptistic church, we believe that the Bible calls for confessing believers to be baptized by immersion and gathered into local churches which God has equipped with the spiritual gifts needed to follow God's word and to live on mission.

If you were to tell your neighbors that you go to a conservative, reformed, evangelical, baptistic church, I can promise you that they will have some presuppositions about what you believe and how you live.

As we've been working through the book of Proverbs we have walked right into many of those presuppositions. So far the wisdom of God has warned us frequently against three common areas of sin: gluttony, adultery or any sex outside of marriage, and drunkenness.

For some reason most people inside the church glance over gluttony, though it is foolish to do so. But most people outside the church are keenly aware of where a conservative, evangelical, Baptist church might stand on issues of sex and alcohol. And to tell your neighbor that your conservative, evangelical, Baptist church has preached consecutive weeks on sex and alcohol they might simply reply, "That seems about right."

But this is why Proverbs is so unique.

While Solomon warns of gluttony, he also says that the wisdom of God is like choice honey which we should want to eat indulgently. While Solomon warns of sex outside of marriage, he not only calls husbands and wives to stagger in sexual intimacy, but he holds up wisdom as the satisfying spouse which all of us may have. And while Solomon today warns us of the dangers of alcohol, he says in Proverbs 3:10 that the wise man will be rewarded by God with vats bursting with wine.

In our age of absolute statements Proverbs again shows how it doesn't fit. It forces wise reflection. It doesn't simply tell us to use food, sex and alcohol however we see fit, but it also doesn't tell us that we should avoid at all costs food, sex and alcohol. Both extremes miss the joy wisdom wants to bring us.

Instead, whether we eat or drink, or don't, Solomon wants the Christian to see that these things belong to God and are given from God. They are his gifts. As such we are able to make wise decisions in submission to God instead of abusing the gifts by our own rules.

Today, as we talk about alcohol Solomon wants us to help us see how the good news of Jesus Christ changes our relationship to alcohol based off our relationship to him. In other words: **Knowing God's wisdom changes what we know about alcohol and how we use it.**

We are going to see this in three ways today. First, as we examine Proverbs 23:29-35 we are going to see **Alcohol in the Context of Wisdom**, where Solomon warns us of the dangers of drunkenness. But then as we look at the rest of the story of scripture we are going to see **Alcohol in the Context of the Gospel**. Then lastly, in light of what God's word says we are going to apply this text by looking at **Alcohol in the Context of the Church**.

While we all have thoughts on alcohol, and those thoughts dictate how we use or don't use alcohol, Solomon today wants you to have a biblical view of alcohol. We live in a state with the third highest brewery rate per capita which is to say that we need to be sure that what is passively already inside our workplace and our home is spoken to by God's objective truth in his word.

We've defined wisdom throughout Proverbs as seeing the world through God's eyes. In this text today, Solomon is going to invite us to see alcohol through God's eyes by holding before our eyes the dangers of drunkenness. On theologian calls this passage, "the drunkard's looking glass." It is the mirror which is finally held up to the face of those who are blind so they might truly see their own condition. In many ways Solomon wishes to make us inebriated with the folly of drunkenness.

In a part of Proverbs where Solomon is preparing young adults to go out into the world, he wants to equip them with a sober picture. In fact, what I want you to notice in our passage today is that Solomon begins with an undefined subject. He begins with the call of "Who is the one?," then he goes into the second person saying, "you will see strange things," and then in his powerful conclusion he goes into the first person and says, "I must have another drink."

He moves from undefined to deeply personal as if to say, this could be you if you are not careful.

It is in light of this implicit danger that Solomon wants to show us: **Alcohol in the Context of Wisdom**.

To begin, Solomon invites us to play a game of "Guess Who" with him: **Proverbs 23:29**.

By the time we get to the end of this verse we realize that the subject of this guessing game is not someone to be envied. We see in this passage a person who has problems at every level of life.

They are emotionally distraught with woe and sorrow. They are relationally destructive bringing only strife and complaining into their community. Additionally they are physically maligned, they have wounds they don't even remember getting, and their eyes are dry and swollen from dehydration.

Think of this as the world's first "Jeopardy" game. The category is "Fantastic Follies," the prompt "This person is characterized by internal turmoil, destroys relationships with those around them and has a body that is wasting away."

Solomon buzzes in and provides the answer: "What is **Proverbs 23:30**."

Who is this woeful person? The one who tarries long over wine and is always looking to make his alcohol more and more palatable.

What does it mean to tarry? It means to hesitate, to linger. To stick around just a little bit longer than you should have. Have you ever answered a phone call from an unknown number and said, "Hello," only to be met with what I call the "pause of doom." If you're smart, you've realized that if you answer and there is a pause on the other end, that it's a telemarketer and since the computer heard you answer, it's patching you to a representative.

Whenever I hear that pause, it is a race to hang up that phone. But sometimes, I tarry. Sometimes the number seems legit enough, or there was almost an answer at the other end, and then I'm caught in a conversation I never wanted to be a part of.

To tarry over alcohol is to hear the pause, and to say, let's hear this one out. He doesn't start with a whole keg, he starts with a beer, a glass of wine, but by the end of the night, he's frequented the table more than he thought.

Earlier in the Proverbs Solomon warned of the sluggard as he says, "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber and want like an armed man."

Just as the sluggards starts with a little nap, a little shut eye, and soon he is brought to nothing—so too those who tarry over alcohol.

Now this is where we need to be very cautious. Solomon doesn't answer his riddle by saying: "It's the drunk! He's the one who's ruined his life!" His answer is simply: "The one who lingers, who takes a second glance, who stays a little longer than they should."

In other words it starts with any of us. It doesn't begin with an intoxicated person, but with an enchanted heart.

So how are we to guard ourselves from this? Solomon tell us how we are to consider alcohol in light of this: **Proverbs 23:31-32**.

How are we to view alcohol? We are not to see it based off its sweet beginnings, but off of its devastating ends.

He says, "Don't look at the cup when it looks nice and red, don't even consider it when it hits your tongue and tastes sweet and delicious...instead look at its end. It bites like a snake and kills you with its poison."

This is a needed perspective today as our culture lives in the assessment only of the red and sparkly cup.

Have you noticed how many TV shows and movies rely on their characters getting drunk in order to make us laugh? We have phrases like, "Hold my beer..." and "liquid courage." Which imply that when drunk we become funnier, stronger, braver. But what is created in the laboratory of TV and film is not representative of what we experience in reality.

In reality, alcohol abuse and drunkenness is devastating. It ruins families, it takes lives, it produces emotion, sexual and physical abuse. What is laughable when seen on prime-time TV is devastating when seen in living color.

I have good friends who won't touch alcohol because of the way in which they were harmed by parents when they were drunk. I've heard stories of people losing their jobs and careers over a single dumb decision which was made while under the influence. I've encountered brilliant minds and great athletes who lost scholarships, financial aid and much of their future because of the sting of alcohol.

We live in a unique culture where you can wander the streets of Missoula and see first-hand how substance abuse has produced effects of homelessness, brokenness and poverty while right next door are people drinking and thinking: that could never be me.

But here the Bible refuses to whitewash the dangers of a view of alcohol shaped by culture and not by Christ. In fact earlier in Proverbs, Solomon tells us that those who are led astray by alcohol are inhibited from wisdom: **Proverbs 20:1**.

It is in light of this sentiment where Solomon continues to show us how drunkenness is the anti-wisdom, it is the opposite of all the good God desires for us. Read with me: **Proverbs 23:33-35**.

A good friend of our church, Todd Miles, has a forthcoming book on the Christian and marijuana. While the high of marijuana is not a one to one comparison to drunkenness, part of his research was to study all the Bible had to say about drunken and inebriated states. He said that there are three primary categories which the Bible says are affected when one is inebriated. Those are moral ability, cognitive ability and physical ability. We see all three of these in our text this morning, all three wage war against wisdom.

Morally, we see that alcohol clouds our vision and causes our hearts to utter perverse things. If the standard for biblical wisdom is the one who sees life through the eyes of the Lord, then nothing is more harmful to the path of seeing clearly than having eyes which see false things.

In the cloud of drunkenness what God sees as good, we see as harmful. What God sees as harmful, we see as good. The result: Our heart utters perverse things.

This is a really important truth for us to understand. We often explain away and justify things spoken by a drunkard, or actions individuals take when they are drunk. But in the book of Proverbs there is a word for lips, there is another Hebrew word for mouth. But here Solomon doesn't say your lips, or your mouth will utter perverse things. Instead he says the heart will.

In other words all the filth, all the disgust, all the garbage that comes out of a drunk person is not contrary to who they are, it is actually a glimpse into what is in the heart even when sober. It exposes the worst in us with no hope.

It is devastating to think of how many cases of adultery in the church happen under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol reveals the worst of what is in our hearts without any hope for the sinner. But look at the hope there is for those who are exposed by something else: **Hebrews 4:12-14**.

What's the difference? Alcohol exposes our hearts and only harms us with the evil in it. But the word of God exposes our hearts and brings us safely to the great high priest who can deal with our sin by taking the pain and shame of it in his own body for us.

Secondly, alcohol inhibits our cognitive ability. Solomon makes this point in **Proverbs 23:34**.

God made us to work, he made us to see problems and to want to solve them as image bearers of himself. But alcohol makes us unable to comprehend our actions and our responses. Here he paints the picture of being on a sinking ship in a storm and instead of realizing that the swaying of the ship should rouse us to labor and resistance, the drunkard misunderstands his surroundings and instead allows himself to be put to sleep by the waves.

It creates in us people who can't perceive how to act, it keeps us from understanding the reality of the world we are in and prevents us from responding in a way that glorifies God and loves others.

But lastly, we see alcohol affecting our physical wellbeing: **Proverbs 23:35**.

Here is a man so disoriented that he can't even tell who struck him. Violence and alcohol go hand in hand. It touches the lips like a lover but stings the belly like a brawler.

But because this man is so given over to alcohol, he refuses to acknowledge the pain it causes him. He chooses to not feel it and instead, even as he is in a coma from being pummeled to death, longs only to wake up so that he might have another drink.

Where culture calls us to giggle, God calls us to grieve. Drunkenness, a buzzed night on the town, might be a joke to us, but it is not to God. Why? Because it dishonors God and it harms you and others. The sting is to be felt in this text so that it is not felt in your life.

In fact, drunkenness is not only out of place in the life of a believer, but it is actually opposite to God's great goals in salvation. It denies the reward of Jesus. Consider the culture around the drunkard in the text we just read and now consider Paul's words in **Ephesians 5:18-20**.

Christians are not to be compelled by alcohol, but controlled by the Spirit. We are meant to be mastered not by what destroys, but by what builds up others and delights God.

But this is where we need to also see our second point today: **Alcohol in the Context of the Gospel**.

The first time we read of alcohol in scripture is right after God wiped out all the wicked people in the flood, only to find Noah, the lone righteous man, naked and drunk in his tent.

Then we read of other Old Testament heroes being foolish with alcohol. It's used to deceive, it's used to entrap, and it's used to destroy. It almost leaves us to wonder if anyone can be wise with alcohol.

But then Jesus comes, and guess what his first miracle is? Turning water into wine. What was Jesus known for by the Pharisees? Look at how Jesus himself describes their perception of him in **Luke 7:33-35**.

What's the point? The point was that finally the wise man had come who ate and drank, but was not a glutton or a drunkard. Here was Jesus as wisdom incarnate the one who saw what God created and used it wisely in submission to God without sin.

Part of the wild thing about alcohol is that even though the dangers of it are spoken to throughout the whole Bible, it is actually a sign of God's covenant blessing. Israel is spoken of as God's vineyard which will produce choice wine. When the prophets warned of God's coming judgment on their sin it was through the metaphor of God removing their wine, but the hope of the new covenant passages promised that based on God's mercy he would once more fill their vats with wine and their jugs with oil.

More than this, the Lord's Supper which Jesus himself instituted had wine at the center of it. Wine which was meant to point forward to the coming Kingdom of God: **Luke 22:14-20**.

More than simply drinking or not drinking, Christians should care about we think about wine and beer because the promise of the cup of Christ is part of God's redemptive covenant.

The two sins which humanity generally tip toes around are sexual sins and sins of drunkenness. Universally, most cultures lack self-control towards each of these areas, but they are also burdened with the nagging vice of each of these.

But in both the fruit of the vine and in the union of marital sex are two neon signs of God's covenant love for us. Sex is meant to give us an experience of what Christ's love for the church is like. Wine is to give us a taste of what beautiful celebration there is to be brought back into the Garden-Kingdom of God.

Could it be then, that when it comes to issues like sex and drunkenness it is not that our desires are too much but too little? Perhaps we run to gluttony, to sexuality and to drunkenness because at the heart of each of those is a longing which only Jesus is meant to meet. We only find our fill when we come to the table of Jesus, we only satisfy our longings for intimacy when we are united with Jesus in the church, and we only celebrate ultimately when we take the cup of Jesus which was poured out for our sins.

It is here, in Jesus Christ we see that our desire for relief and intimacy fulfilled not in the excessive consumption of the sign, but in submission to the substance: Jesus Christ the true bridegroom and true vine.

The cup that Christ offers us in redemption is a cup whose end does not sting and whose venom does not destroy. To see that cup is to see our own cups differently. Because Jesus holds out this cup for us, because those who are saved by his perfect embodiment of wisdom have been filled with the Holy Spirit we can turn to wine not in gospel-void absolutes, but in wise submission to what honors the Lord and serves his church.

This is our last point today: **Alcohol in the Context of the Church**.

So we see that the Bible doesn't prohibit the consumption of alcohol, but we also see that the Bible warns strongly of falling prey to the vice of alcohol. So how do we apply this text in the context of the church?

Well first, we realize that ***Drunkenness has no place in the Lord's church***.

Look at how the apostle Paul speaks of this in **1 Corinthians 5:11-13**. Unrepentant drunkenness is part of the list which Paul calls the church to discipline people over. Why? Look at what he says shortly after this: **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**.

Paul wants us to not be slaves to alcohol because to be a slave to wine is to not be a slave to Jesus. But Paul gives hope, such were some of you, but Jesus washed you. For those who are enslaved, for those who are in sin the church exists to help point you to the only King who loves you and can save you.

If you wrestle with alcohol like this, it might feel shameful to bring it up, but it's more shameful to hurt and waste away in secret. Where we often think of alcohol as the truth serum, the gospel is a better one. Discipleship in the local church is a place where the power of Jesus grace allows us to be honest with people about our sin for the sake of rejoicing in our redemption.

Second, ***Enjoyment of alcohol points us towards Christ, not away from him.***

Remember what Jesus said in Luke 22, that he has abstained from wine until we come to him? In the mean-time he has not called the church to abstain from alcohol. But as we enjoy alcohol responsibly, what helps us not stare at the sparkle is to stare at the Savior.

Look at **Psalms 104:14-15**. Wine and beer are a gift from God which is meant to lead us towards him, not away from him. When you drink delight in God. Rejoice that Jesus has given this to you and think about that day when we get to share a drink with God in heaven.

Third, ***Don't look for the sign to provide the relief of the Savior.***

Christians, if they do drink, should not drink in order for alcohol to bring them relief. Jesus brings us relief. If you are going home after a long day and your biggest desire is to pour yourself a glass, that's a sign you shouldn't.

Alcohol doesn't bring us peace, Jesus does. Alcohol doesn't help us cope, Jesus does. Alcohol doesn't take away the burden of sin, Jesus does.

Lastly, ***Don't cause others to sin.***

For many good reasons, there are some Christians who should not drink. There are some believers who have been harmed by alcohol and don't want to harm others, there are some Christians who know they would not be able to say no to the sting of it and choose instead to entirely abstain.

Yet, we often assume those who abstain to be prudish. We don't ever think the same about those who willingly choose to be single and abstinent for the glory of God. If Paul can say to the believers in Corinth that he himself wishes that some would abstain from marriage, can we not also celebrate those who for the glory of God abstain from alcohol?

And those who abstain, don't look judgmentally, on those who do drink. But as Paul says to both those who are wrestling over similar matters: **1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1**

For who abstain from alcohol, let our lives show that like Jesus, we have no lack of joy for we are awaiting the cup of lasting joy. For those who partake, let us imitate Jesus and drink without the stains of drunkenness. It is our proximity to him which allows our participation in alcohol to become a witness to hope we have and want others to see.