



## Much Wine and Wisdom Don't Mix

*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. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. "They hit me," you will say, "but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?"*

- I'm sure you've all seen the reports and read the news headlines: alcohol sales have skyrocketed during the Coronavirus pandemic, up some 40% from last year. All locked up with nothing to do and nowhere to go, with anxiety and stress on the rise, many Americans are using alcohol as a coping device and a means of escaping reality. And in part all of us are to blame. Let's be honest, the over-consumption of alcohol largely gets a free pass in our society on account of it being more wide-spread and socially acceptable than other forms of drug abuse. I mean if you get together to have some drinks with your pals on the patio, you're a socialite, but if you shoot up with friends in the basement, you're a druggie. My point here is not to say that drinking an old fashioned and putting a needle in your arm are exactly the same thing, but there is a point of similarity. That escapist mentality comes from the same sinful place and if left unchecked, can lead to many of the very same problems.
- We Christians (and perhaps we Midwest Lutherans in particular) are fond of saying that the Bible nowhere makes a blanket prohibition against the consumption of alcohol, and that's true. However, just like that surgeon general's notice stares you in the face on each can or bottle, the Scriptures do give us plenty of warnings about the abuse of alcohol. King Solomon, who had unlimited wealth, huge palaces, royal vineyards, and daily feasts on golden plates and goblets, was definitely no stranger to the dangers of alcohol. He begins this series of proverbs with a barrage of questions: if you want to find someone who's depressed and sorrowful, whose relationships are ruined, who's covered in bruises, and has bloodshot eyes, you can find them among those who linger over wine and make much of sampling the latest varieties. The Hebrew says, "those who seek out" wine—as in that is their goal, that's what drives them.
- Now does this mean it's a sin to go on a brewery tour or attend a wine tasting? Not necessarily. As we read elsewhere in Scripture, it's a matter of self-control. Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 we Christians have really been set free in Christ, but once any craving for food or drink or caffeine or sex or cigarettes or anything else controls us and our decisions, we have lost our freedom and returned to slavery. When we cannot say, "No," to something, we have a problem, because then that addiction has become our master. Then we are no longer living to the glory of God nor able to love and serve our neighbor unconditionally.
- Solomon goes on to describe the disastrous side-effects of drinking. For starters, one drink easily leads to another. The second and third glasses of wine always go down more smoothly than the first. But in the end excessive alcohol consumption shows it's true colors—that it is a poison—by confusing your mind

and making you nauseous and senseless (and thereby rendering you incapable of making godly choices and unfit to help anyone who needs you). But despite all that sickness and incapacity, wine, liquor, and beer have powerful hooks. The cycle of addiction is strong: "When can I get up and have another drink?"

- My friends, Solomon's words give us a sober wake up call. While not outright prohibiting their consumption, at the very least this word of God should give any of us who have an occasional drink reason to stop and reflect and honestly ask ourselves, "Who is in control?" and then look for actual evidence of that control in our own lives. And should we or a loved one be trapped in the cycle of alcohol addiction, there's no shame in getting the professional help and spiritual support needed to break free from this habit. Jesus Christ has overcome and conquered sin and death for us. There is no pain or emptiness, no addiction or desire, that is stronger than his love for us, that his wounds cannot heal over time.

Prayer: Gracious God, you have created all things in heaven and on earth for our godly use and enjoyment. Help us to praise you for your goodness and give us a spirit of wisdom and self-control that enables us to use your gifts in knowledge and moderation so that we may be ever-ready to glorify you and serve our neighbor. At the same time when and where we have allowed the abuse of your blessings and our craving for more lead us to wander from the path of godliness, forgive us for Jesus' sake and empower us to live a life changed by your grace. Amen.