

DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

We understand that your stomach is troubling you somewhat. We are not doctors, but have always wanted to be. We know of a drug that we can prescribe for you. It is available over the counter. It can be purchased anywhere. It can even be, and usually is, self administered. We might as well admit that it has a few side effects, but they are relatively minor. It is said that incorrectly administered doses are responsible for over 500,000 traffic deaths every year. 80% of all deaths by fire are reportedly because of the misuse of this drug. On occasion, it causes temporary insanity that is held responsible for 65% of all drowning, 65% of murders, 30% of the suicides, and two out of three incidents of child abuse. But you are probably mature enough to handle this drug. Society and your peers insist that it is so. Advertisers tell you over and over and over of its virtues and surely those who sell it are trustworthy. There is at least one scripture that seems to validate the use of this drug. So trust us, Steven. Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake.

Mind you, we could not say the same thing about cigarettes. There just is no redeeming medicinal value to a product that is addictive to 90% of those who inhale it and nearly as guaranteed to be fatal. We can understand the cravings of someone who is already addicted. We can sympathize with the agony of those trying to quit such an expensive habit. We have just never understood why anyone would start sucking smoke, a hot cloud of particles of ash, into their lungs. That sounds as enticing as eating the remains of a campfire. At that point we would certainly need something for our stomach's sake.

We would choose to make that something non-alcoholic. We can not argue that it is a biblical choice. We are well aware that even though the wine of biblical times was not very potent and was the drink of choice at meals, nonetheless, it was wine. The Bible really speaks against excess in this area as well as others and admonishes against drunkenness. We can not argue that it has no medicinal value, for many are the suffering throughout history, including ourselves, that have tried and found it to be a charming anesthetic and antiseptic. We will not argue that it does not stimulate the palate and enhance the taste of food, for we know this to be true. Instead, let us talk of how the Holy Ghost, put within us to lead and guide us into all truth, seems to lead us away from any form of alcoholic beverages.

We must never forget that we are part of a body of believers. Though we do not seek the approval of others, we must remember that there are eyes upon us and upon our lives. Some of these are babes in the Lord. Three of them are our children in the flesh. Although some have a built-in metabolic resistance to the effects of alcohol, we recognize that there are many incredibly effected by it. There are some in the body for whom this drug was a demon from which they have been delivered by the mercy of God. Were we to gain their respect, then choose to partake of it in their presence, we would have validated the use of that from which they had been delivered. God forbid that a foolish decision on our part should cause a brother or sister, possibly one that we had won to Christ, to fail in this area. God said there would be dire consequences for those who caused one of His children to stumble. So we choose not to partake at all, and if we err, we err on the side of safety.

We are also well aware of genetics and the effects of heredity. We know the effect that alcohol has had on the lives on our families through the past generations. The number of alcoholics in our relatives is sobering enough without even considering the families of those we love that have been destroyed by the cumulative effect and isolated incidents of drinking. Knowing this, and the blessings God has bestowed upon our marriage, our home, and our children, how could we choose to introduce the use of alcohol into our blessings? Again, if we err, we err on the side of safety.

We are eternally grateful for the minds that God has given us to use for His glory. So we choose not to deliberately impair their ability to function. For some who do so in order to forget the pain of their past, it is our commission to let them know that God has a sea of forgetfulness that is far more capable of drowning sorrow than beer is. In order to do that and remain credible, we must choose not to play the fool. We have been to many parties. When someone is flat drunk and people are laughing, they are not laughing with him. The really frightening thing about willingly blotting out the function of your mind is waking up afterwards. You may not be clothed or alone. You may be a new father or mother. You may have AIDS. You might be maimed or crippled for life. You may suffer only from a splitting headache caused by oxygen deprivation. If you wake up at all. That is a pretty grim set of choices, but it is also a good cross section of friends we have known, comforted, and sometimes helped bury.

The last scenario is this. It has occurred to you that your best friend is going to die and go to an eternal hell unless you can persuade him that you have found a better purpose for life in living for God. The problem is that you partied with him last night and acted like more of a fool than he ever has. Now you need to convince him with your life that God has made you righteous. Is he buying it? Didn't think so!

The choice becomes easier to understand when we also admit that alcohol just never did much for us. Although there were some alcoholic drinks we thought tasted okay, almost anything else still tasted better to us. Especially in light of the fact that one could purchase four or five soft drinks for the price of one mixed drink. Parties never interested us either. You see, we were raised in church. The truth is that, even though you may not have totally consecrated your life to God, still you have been with Him. You can come into the presence of God from anywhere, but you can't go anywhere from there. After the beauty of what we had experienced, the laughter of the parties was hollow and frenzied, what passed for love was cheap, and the drinking just bored us. There is no joy like that of the Holy Ghost. If you forsake it, nothing will be able to thrill you until you come back into the presence of Jesus.

The last part of our choice has to do with stewardship. The Bible warns in several places, such as Prov 20:1, against the misuse of alcohol. The church has steadily preached abstinence. Only recently has medical science caught up with the eternal truth of God and "discovered" the many health problems associated with drinking and smoking. Yet, we have known these truths in our hearts for a long time. They stem from our love for the God that lives within us. 1 Cor 13, the love chapter, tells us that love seeks not its own. We have not been our own for many years now. We were bought with a price and paid for in blood. In keeping with any other sacrifice, though living, we belong to God. As servants, entrusted with a possession of the master, we take care of our bodies so as to preserve them for His purposes. Recognizing the inherent dangers of the use of this drug, we choose to abstain from it as a form of worship and gratitude to our maker. Our Creator prescribed an entirely different Spirit to be taken internally for whatever ails us. We put our trust in Him. The Great Physician.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Were you aware that alcohol is a drug with side effects that alter your perception of reality, often dangerously so?
2. Were you aware that smoke is made of very fine particles of ash that are light enough to rise on hot air?
3. How many other things are you aware of that the Bible does not necessarily define as sinful, in and of themselves, but warns against the abuse, or excess use of them?

4. Have you ever known anyone who drinks alcoholic beverages with their meals for culinary enjoyment? How about as part of their culture? How about as part of a celebration or commemoration such as wedding toasts or communion? Are they wrong in doing so?
5. Does alcohol have any proven medicinal values?
6. If any or all of the above are true and acceptable uses of alcohol, why do many choose to abstain from its use as part of their consecration to God? Is it a way to deny ourselves and take up His cross? Are there other reasons? Is such abstinence necessary to be a Christian?
7. There are some who become blind drunk with one half a glass of wine. Others seem not to be affected. Have you ever known anyone with no tolerance for alcohol?
8. Have you ever known, or worse yet, loved, an alcoholic and had to watch as their lives were destroyed by dependence on this drug?
9. Have you ever laughed at someone's drunken behavior? Was there any admiration or friendship in your humor?
10. What are some of the consequences of drunkenness that have been suffered by friends you have known? Would you give someone you loved enough alcohol to consume to shut down their rational minds? Would you want those who loved you to give it to you?
11. Do the roles of drunkenness and being a living testimony to the power of Christ to transform lives really seem compatible?
12. Have you ever experienced a drinking party? Did it seem to you like the participants were experiencing any joy? How did you care for the behavior of the participants with their inhibitions dampened? Pleasing to their Creator? Did you fit in? Make any true friends?
13. What nature reigns supreme when the Spirit and the soul, including the mind, are weakened or unconscious for all practical purposes?
14. If you have given your life to Christ, do you still feel like it belongs to you?
15. Can you reconcile in your mind the acts of drinking and smoking with taking care of your temple which belongs to God?