

# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## A BIBLICAL LOOK AT “SOCIAL DRINKING”

### Part One

by Lee Moses

No one with a modicum of sense would deny that drinking alcoholic beverages has tremendously devastated society. Countless homes have been broken, careers have been ruined, and lives have been ended as a result of drinking. And no one with a modicum of Bible knowledge would deny that God condemns drunkenness (Deuteronomy 21:20-21; 1 Samuel 1:13-16; Isaiah 5:11; Luke 21:34; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10; Galatians 5:21). So it is not only temporal lives, but also eternal souls, that have been and continue to be destroyed by the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Nonetheless, there has been an increased push for the acceptance of “social drinking.” While drinking alcoholic beverages causes people to become obnoxious, belligerent, and destructive; advocates maintain that moderate drinking which causes people to become light-hearted and convivial is acceptable, and perhaps advisable. They have come up with several arguments in favor of “social drinking,” some of which attempt to find Biblical support. But what do the facts—particularly the **Biblical** facts—have to say about these arguments in favor of “social

drinking”? This issue of the *Fulton County Gospel News* will begin to consider the main arguments made for “social drinking” in the light of the facts—particularly the **Biblical** facts.

### “Moderate Drinking is Better Than Excessive Drinking”

This is perhaps the simplest argument for “social drinking,” and is a true statement in and of itself. But just because moderate drinking is better than excessive drinking does not prove that it is right (See “Just Because It’s Better Than Worse Doesn’t Mean It’s Good,” **FCGN**, July 2006). One could probably argue successfully that cocaine use is better than heroin use, but that would not prove that cocaine use is a remotely good idea. And the Scriptures teach against the recreational use of alcohol, even in moderation.

Paul wrote by inspiration, “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5:18). Paul certainly does not condone “social drinking” when he condemns drunkenness. “*Be not drunk*” has the idea behind it, “**do not even begin the process of becoming drunk.**”<sup>1</sup> All one has to do to begin the process is to take

that first sip. Upon its first sip, alcohol **immediately** begins its process of affecting judgment and other aspects of brain function. As Dr. Frederick Lemere of the University of Washington School of Medicine noted, some of the first brain cells affected by alcohol are “those subserving the higher cerebral levels of will power and judgment. The brain reserve is gradually and insidiously whittled away.” When one intentionally clouds his judgment and “whittles away” his brain reserve, how seriously can he be taking the Biblical injunction to be sober, alert, and watchful? (Matthew 24:42-51; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; Revelation 3:2-3). Some ridicule the notion, but saying that a person who drinks one drink is “one drink drunk” is a **fact**. Every Biblical passage that condemns drunkenness condemns even such **slight** drunkenness.

Some things simply cannot be done in moderation. Again note what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:18: “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess*” (emphasis LM). There is a pronoun underlying the word “wherein” (thus the New King James Version’s rendering, “*in which*”), and a pronoun refers back to a noun with which it agrees in gender and number.<sup>2</sup> In this case, the pronoun refers most naturally to “wine.” So the Bible teaches that “excess,” or “reckless abandon” or “debauchery,”<sup>3</sup> is **in the (alcoholic) wine itself**. Something that is intrinsically excessive cannot be done in moderation. Can you

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imagine someone saying, "I shoot heroin in moderation," or, "I snort coke in moderation"? It sounds silly on the face of it, does it not? However, because of a false respectability that has been imputed to alcoholic beverages in our culture, many people fail to realize that it is just as silly to say, "I drink alcohol in moderation."

Some advocate drinking in less quantity because they believe it is a **preventative** to drinking in greater quantity. One professed Christian college recently changed its long-standing policy, now allowing students to drink off-campus. To justify this change, an administrator said, "Unfortunately, some of our students participate in dangerous and illegal drinking on campus and around campus, and we're not effectively addressing it."<sup>4</sup> Apparently a primary means of addressing the problem of

dangerous drinking is to allow safer drinking. Beer companies, in an effort to displace any blame they might receive for enabling alcohol-related deaths, have long broadcast messages such as "drink responsibly" and "use a designated driver." It is sad when those who profess to promote Christian principles come closer to the message of the beer companies than that of the word of God.

The wisdom of Proverbs warns against the effects of alcohol. But to avoid such pitfalls, Proverbs does not say, "Drink responsibly." Proverbs does not say, "Use a designated driver." Proverbs says, "*Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright*" (23:31). On other words, do not even entertain the thought of taking that first sip. Wise words—and as Paul wrote immediately before he also condemned the use of alcohol in any quantity, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is*" (Ephesians 5:17). How could anyone believe that the will of the Lord is for him to "get a little buzzed"?

Once the door has been cracked to drinking in smaller quantities, the floodgates have inescapably been opened wide to drinking in larger quantities as well. No one has ever been guilty of binge drinking who did not take a first sip. No one has ever become an alcoholic who did not take a first sip. If some people have a genetic propensity to alcoholism, as it is commonly held, how can one justify allowing such people to take that first, potentially life-ruining, sip? Experts speak of "gateway drugs," less harmful drugs that eventually lead many of the users thereof toward more

dangerous drugs. There could not be a more obvious gateway than that from moderate drinking to excessive drinking. Many who are already drinkers pass through this gateway regularly: How many times has someone gone to a bar after work, intending to have only a drink or two, and end up staying for several hours and several drinks beyond what anyone would call "moderate"? Similarly, many persons who decide to take their first drink never envision where it might lead them. No alcoholic arrived at his present predicament by design.

There can be little doubt that a relaxed attitude toward drinking alcoholic beverages in any quantity can have far-reaching consequences:

The evidence indicates that teen-age drinking is a *reflection of the drinking habits of adults and of the attitudes of adults towards drinking*. The fact that most adults regard alcohol as a recreational beverage rather than a drug is reflected in the attitudes of the teen-agers. Only when adults start regarding alcohol as a toxic drug can a sound, effective alcohol education for America's youth begin (emphasis in original).<sup>5</sup>

And it would be naïve to assert that teenagers are the only ones affected by such a mindset (compare with 1 Corinthians 15:32-33). The New Testament strongly condemns those who would lay a stumblingblock before others, who would cause others to go astray (Matthew 18:6-7; Romans 14:13). Condoning the consumption of alcohol in any amount may well be the stumbling-

block that causes lives to be ruined and souls to be lost that otherwise would not.

Is “moderate” drinking better than excessive drinking? Perhaps. But this by no means makes it a good idea; neither does it provide Biblical authority for it, nor negate the Biblical prohibition against it.

Next month, we will continue to examine the main arguments made for “social drinking,” beginning with the “social custom” argument.

<sup>1</sup> “[M]ethuskō signifies ‘to make drunk, or to grow drunk’ (an inceptive verb, marking the process or the state [of be(com)ing drunk, LM])” (emphases LM). W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr. *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996 printing), p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2000), p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Asōtia*, in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> Lauren Sutton, “University plans to amend alcohol policy for 2008-09,” *ACU Optimist* April 11, 2008. Available <<http://media.www.acuoptimist.com/media/storage/paper891/news/2008/04/11/News/University.Plans.To.Amend.Alcohol.Policy.For.200809-3319818.shtml>>.

<sup>5</sup> Edmond G. Addeo and Jovita Reichling Addeo, *Why Our Children Drink* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 71.

## “I GIVE UNTO THEM ETERNAL LIFE”

by Marvin L. Weir

In John’s Gospel account Jesus says, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand*” (John 10:27-28). The denominational religious world has long used these verses in an attempt to support their false teaching of “impossibility of apostasy” or “once saved, always saved.” But the Bible does not

teach this damnable doctrine, and the above verses are no comfort to those who cling to Calvinistic theories.

The “sheep” in the above passage are certainly not the **unbelieving** Jews who eventually crucified the Messiah. One cannot help but notice that these “sheep” **hear** the Master’s voice, and the Master knows them because they **follow** Him! All those who are willing to follow the Lord are assured of life eternal. This is a promise that results in the rejoicing of every believer in the Word of God. It is a truth that the one **following** the Lord cannot be against his will be snatched away by another. Even the devil is powerless to “snatch” one who is determined to be faithful from the Lord’s hand!

The one following the Lord, however, can himself cease to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7). People can reach the point where they choose to “*not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables*” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). A child of God can “*err from the truth*” and the one who “*converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins*” (James 5:19-20).

The Bible often affirms that God’s children can go astray. The writer of Hebrews warns, “*Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God: but exhort*

*one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*” (Hebrews 3:12-13). Those of denominational persuasion claim that if one indeed falls away from God, it is because he was never saved. How can one “fall away” from somewhere he has never been? He cannot!

The apostle Paul warned some of the Galatian brethren by saying, “*Ye are severed from Christ, ye would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace*” (Gal. 5:4). You will note that these people were **severed from Christ**. They were children of God who **had been** following the Lord. Here is an instance where these brethren had already fallen from grace. Guy Woods correctly observes that Jesus does not take goats and turn them into sheep by giving them eternal life.

At what point do followers of the Lord receive eternal life? All followers of Christ receive eternal life in **promise**, but it becomes a **possession** in the hereafter. Mark 10:30 reads, “*but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*” You will notice that eternal life becomes a reality in “*the world to come.*”

One does not hope for that which he has. Yet, the Bible speaks of the “*hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal*” (Titus 1:2). Such is the reason that love is greater than faith and hope — faith will one day become sight, and once in heaven one will no longer



hope for the celestial city.

May all realize that before death they must **heed** and **follow** the Word of God if they are to be saved! Jesus taught, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”* (Matthew 7:21-23).

All who are willing to believe and obey the Good Shepherd (Christ) have the **right** to become children of God (John 1:12). God calls **all** today in exactly the same way – through the precious gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14; Romans 1:16). There is only **one** gospel – not many (Galatians 1:6).

The apostle Paul taught exactly as did Christ. To the Romans he said, *“Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness”* (Romans 6:16-18). May we choose well whom we will serve and follow! Our eternal destiny depends upon the choice we make.

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### GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

- Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
- Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
- Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
- Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
- Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
- After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

### THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

- The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
- Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
- Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
- Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
- Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
- Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
- Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
- Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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