

Alcohol and the Ministry

A DISCUSSION PAPER

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Introduction:

The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) has historically expected its ministers and members to abstain from alcohol.¹ This is in keeping with our roots as a fellowship within the Holiness traditions of the Evangelical Church that incubated the Pentecostal Revival over 100 years ago. For the majority of our history, adherence to this expectation has been nearly universal. With the noted exception of some in our fellowship who come from cultural backgrounds where moderate alcohol consumption was acceptable, our ministers were abstainers and the majority of our members followed this example.

This commitment to abstinence was motivated by a desire to always be filled with the Holy Spirit and to not allow anything in our lives that would hinder service to God and witness to the lost. Abstinence was viewed as a mark of separation from the world.

However, this almost universal abstinence once prevalent amongst our church members is not present today. Nevertheless, the current constitutional expectation for credentialed members remains and is quite clear. All credential holders are expected to refrain from using “mood-altering substances” and this has been understood to include alcohol in any form. Our philosophy with respect to adherence is that credentialed ministers will live in accordance with these principles in an atmosphere of mutual trust and accountability (Ephesians 5:21).²

The purpose of this paper is to examine the question, “Should the PAOC maintain its expectation that ministers abstain from the consumption of alcohol or is it acceptable to drink alcohol in moderation as a beverage?” The question is clear enough. The answer is not. Not only do religious people hold widely different beliefs about God and theology, they also practice and defend lifestyles which illustrate divergent standards of morality.³

The specific question addressed in this paper is not one posed or answered directly by Scripture. Therefore any call to abstinence as a corporate value of the PAOC must be drawn from fundamental ethical principles of Scripture that can be applied to what Romans 14:1 calls, “disputable matters”. Two such principles have been identified as having relevance to this question. The first principle considers the *cultural context* or the *societal situation*. The second principle is found in Paul’s call to limit one’s liberty for the sake of others. It is the principle of *sacrificial or redemptive love*.

The Bible

As Pentecostals and Evangelicals, we hold a high view of Scripture and we pledge allegiance to the Bible as the ultimate and infallible rule of faith and practice when pursuing particular views on moral or theological issues. This commitment compels us to neither add nor take away from the Biblical instruction on behaviour and belief. While certain matters of

morality are clearly and directly addressed in the Bible, the Scripture is not always specific and clear on the “disputable matters” and so sincere inquirers may come to conflicting conclusions. While seeking to submit to Biblical mandates we must be careful to avoid two common mistakes. The first is to ignore the high demands made by Jesus when he calls us to righteousness.

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

The internal righteousness that Jesus preaches in the Sermon on the Mount is far more demanding than the external righteousness of the Pharisees.

The second mistake is the human propensity to establish unnecessary behavioural rules as community boundary markers that go beyond what God himself explicitly commands or forbids.

Alcohol in the Bible

In the course of making a positive evaluation of John the Baptist and his ministry, Jesus makes some unflattering comments to a crowd of listeners (Luke 7:31–35; Matthew 11:7-19). He compared them to children who play pretend games like wedding or funeral and who complain when others will not be adequately merry or mournful to suit the occasion. Jesus makes his point by noting that they were critical of John the Baptist because of his austere Nazirite lifestyle while also being critical of Himself because of His social habits of eating and drinking with a wide variety of people. They slandered one as a demon and the other as a drunkard.

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners’ (Luke 7:33-34).

While this text and the fact that Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding reception in Cana, makes it difficult to conclude that Jesus was an abstainer it is also unwise to conclude that these incidents justify the consumption of alcohol. They do however illustrate the challenge faced when seeking direct ethical guidance from the Biblical references to alcohol.

On the one hand, wine is pictured as a gift from God to make a man’s heart glad (Psalm 104:15). The hope of Israel is described as a bountiful land of corn and wine and when it comes time to worship, God’s people are to present the first fruits of the harvest, or the tithes, to God, in the form a grain, wine and oil (Numbers 18:12).⁴

On the other hand, the Scriptures repeatedly warn against the dangers of alcohol in all forms.

Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler;
Whoever is led astray by them is not wise (Proverbs 20:1).

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' (Proverbs 23:29-35)?

Priests are prohibited from alcohol when serving in the tent of God and part of the Nazirite vow was total abstinence (Leviticus 10:9; Numbers 6:3). Leaders are warned that alcohol can cloud judgment and lead to the perversion of justice (Proverbs 31:4-5).⁵ The teaching here is quite clear. Those in positions of responsibility should not consume alcohol when on duty because others are dependent on them to be at their very best at all times and alcohol potentially impairs performance and judgment.

In the New Testament Paul repeatedly denounces drunkenness as a work of the flesh and it is contrasted with being filled with the Spirit. It is something that keeps people out of the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:18; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:7). We can conclude from Scripture that while drinking was not clearly prohibited as wrong, there are numerous warnings of its dangers and harmfulness and in the case of priestly service, judicial leadership and the Nazirite vow, abstinence was commended.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, his primary purpose was not to deal with the question of whether a person was allowed to consume alcohol (5:18). His point was to show that alcoholic spirits and the Holy Spirit are on different sides of the answer to "How then shall we live?" There are some obvious contrasts – you can be unwise or wise by making the most out of every opportunity in an evil world; you can fail to use your brains or you can understand what the Lord's will is for your life; you can "get drunk on wine" and let your life be riotous or you can "be filled with the Spirit;" you can rejoice with your Christian friends worshiping God, knowing that this is the Lord's will for you and live with thanks for everything is yours in Christ, or you can pursue wine and life will be disordered, confused, and riotous.⁶

A full examination of the pertinent Biblical references to alcohol is found in Appendix I.

How Should We Then Live?

We live in a culture that is at best, morally indifferent. Judeo-Christian values are often mocked and the church is pushed to the margins of society. Yet we are the ‘salt’ and ‘light’ that preserves and protects the very society that ignores us. We are to live in this modern context as followers of Jesus who carry a message of reconciliation and hope in the midst of violence, banality, narcissism, meanness and selfish indifference to the needs of the many in our world.

We must make good decisions about lifestyle and habits. For much of our history, we Pentecostals and Evangelicals have been known for the *things we did not do*, rather than for the *things we do*. We have not been recognized for our social action and engagement in the ills of society even though we are often the first to show up in the midst of disaster and crisis. We need to reverse this view. In 1 Peter 2:12 we are encouraged to,

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Increasingly, our reputation in the world must come from our engagement in issues of justice and poverty, child protection, human dignity, deliverance from addictions and many other social problems faced in the nations. We must boldly and confidently commit to engaging contemporary culture with a fresh vision of hope.

Our answer to this question about alcohol consumption must be rooted in a strong engagement with the societal ills that result from the abuse of alcohol. We must continue to be at the forefront of assisting alcoholics and drug addicts to find deliverance and hope through the gospel message and the loving care of the people of God. Not only do spirit controlled people avoid the degradation of the world, but they are filled with godly wisdom, sacrificial love and a holy compulsion to bring hope to the world.

To be self-controlled is not about adherence to a prescribed set of ethical rules, rather it is about a way of life rooted in the grace of God and the transforming power of His Spirit. To highlight this point, let us consider the relationship of Law and Grace.

The Law and Grace Tension

The issue of the relationship between law and grace and the value or legitimacy, in a fallen world, of defining specific ethical rules has challenged the Church almost from its inception. Both Paul and Jesus strove to liberate people from the bondage of man-made rules that either contradict or diminish God’s good purposes for His people. However, they also called followers of Jesus to display a higher standard of conduct based on the righteousness of Jesus (Matthew 5:20).

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount provides a clear contrast between his approach to law and grace and that of the Pharisees and scribes (Matthew Chs. 5–7). Jesus was not opposed to Mosaic Law, rather, He came to fulfill it. He did not create a new set of laws for his followers (Matthew 5:17), rather he pointed out that keeping the law was a matter of heart as well as external behaviour. He actually increased the demands on his followers by making obedience in the heart the true measure of the Kingdom of God. When He was asked for his choice of the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus replied,

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (Matthew 22:37-40; cf. Mark 12:30-31; See also the "law of Christ" in John 13:34; Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21).

For Jesus, morality flows out of the heart that loves God and loves your neighbor. The Law was and is good, but not sufficient in power to produce the type of people God desired (cf. Romans 7:1-25). With Jesus comes the grace that provides for a new way of life where the regenerated heart initiates behaviors, attitudes, and decisions that are pleasing to God.

Grace and law are frequently contrasted in the letters of Paul where the latter is sometimes invoked as the antithesis of grace, but sometimes affirmed as being good (Galatians 5:4; Romans 7:12; 1 Timothy 1:8). At times NT writers seem to indicate that the obligation to follow any law has ended, since grace has come through Christ (John 1:17; Galatians 3:19-25), believers are no longer "under law" (Romans 6:14), and in fact the law is powerless to help one live a Christian life (Romans 7:1-25). But elsewhere Christians are called upon to adhere to certain laws, rules, or principles in keeping with salvation.⁷ There is, then, a seeming tension and even ambiguity that exists in the NT as to the relevance and applicability of the law for Christian life, and what this means practically for Christian moral and ethical behavior is not always evident.

It is not, then, the issue of justification by grace through faith, but rather these day-to-day tensions between NT believers that serve as the focus of our law/grace discussion.

How is it, on the one hand, that sometimes law appeared to be subsumed to grace, but on the other, that it seemed appropriate for NT leaders to impose rules on believers? One way to resolve this tension is by appealing to broader "principles" which outline some limits to the liberty grace brings.⁸

It should also be noted that when weighing the values and principles upon which we make our decisions, we must recognize that they do not all carry equal weight. It is easy to take a stand on a lower principle that seems justified, but actually undermine other principles of higher order. It may be appropriate and even easy to take a stand on principles which relate to personal liberty or freedom in Christ but not give due consideration to the welfare of others in the body of Christ. Indeed, in weighing the relative value of our principles in making decisions, the example of Jesus in sacrificing for others is a worthy and compelling

model. Redemptive love is a high value that trumps the individual liberties that we enjoy as redeemed new creations living in God's good world.

The question at hand asks if there is any reason in our modern times to call for rules which would instruct PAOC ministers concerning the consumption of alcohol. Are there any contextual reasons to expect a different standard today than in the life and times of Jesus? How does the question relate to law and grace? Does the principle of redemptive love that demands sacrifice apply in this case?

Contextualization: Considering our Societal Situation

Any laws, regulations, guidelines or principles implemented by the church within the course of history which go beyond the clear directives of Scripture must always be understood as existing relative to a particular time and place in history. And as such, they must always be open to revision. The church must discern, by the Spirit, appropriate expectations for Christian behavior in any given historical, cultural or social context. This is the application of the "Contextual Principle" referred to earlier in the paper.

Is the problem of alcohol in 21st Century in Canada reason enough for the PAOC to expect its credential holders to abstain from alcohol as a social statement?

Today, Canadians live in a culture that places a high value on the use of alcohol. Our children and young people continually live under peer pressure to make drinking a central focus of their life.⁹ In fact, our society sends mixed and confusing messages to our youth. On the one hand it severely punishes offenders for drinking and driving and on the other hand shows "cool" young people driving cars to parties where alcohol is not only present but is the very focus of the gathering.

Abuse of alcohol in Canada is a significant social problem especially amongst young people. When examining 12th graders alone, approximately half (41 to 55 percent) report consuming five or more drinks on a single occasion. The rate of heavy drinking is approximately three times higher among youth, 15 to 24 years of age, than adults 25 years and older.¹⁰

With reference to the larger North American context, a Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, reports the following with respect to the United States:

According to a USA Today/HBO poll, 20 percent of Americans indicated they "had an immediate relative who at some point had been addicted to alcohol or drugs. That translates into roughly 40 million American adults with a spouse, parent, sibling or child battling addiction." The US National Institute of Health estimates that 17.6 million people—about one in every 12 adults—abuse alcohol or are alcohol dependent.

Alcohol problems cost American society more than \$184 billion per year in health care, criminal justice, social services, property damage, and loss of productivity expenses. Alcohol is a factor in as many as 105,000 deaths annually in the United States and a

primary contributor to a wide array of health problems and human suffering. These include various cancers, liver disease, alcoholism, brain disorders, motor vehicle crashes, violence, crime, spousal and child abuse, drowning, and suicides.”¹¹

MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, reported that 1,074 of the 2,575 driving fatalities in Canada in 2009 were the result of impaired driving.¹² In fact, it is estimated that four to five million Canadians engage in high risk drinking, which is linked to motor vehicle accidents, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and other health issues, family problems, crime and violence.¹³

The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism in the United States has set up a task force to deal specifically with the problem of drinking on college campuses. The report notes that the drinking issue is a cultural problem: “The tradition of drinking has developed into a kind of culture—beliefs and customs—entrenched in every level of college students’ environments. Customs handed down through generations of college drinkers reinforce students’ expectation that alcohol is a necessary ingredient for social success. These beliefs and the expectations they engender exert a powerful influence over students’ behaviour toward alcohol.”¹⁴ The statistics are sobering to say the least.

Death: 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor vehicle crashes.

Injury: 599,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are unintentionally injured under the influence of alcohol.

Assault: 696,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.

Sexual Abuse: 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.¹⁵

Judith Ramaley, the former President of the University of Vermont, states that “Underage drinking and excessive drinking have negative effects on everything we’re trying to do as a university. They compromise the educational environment, the safety of our students, the quality of life on campus, town/gown relationships, and our reputation.”¹⁶

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are about 2 billion people worldwide who consume alcoholic beverages and 76.3 million with diagnosable alcohol use disorders.¹⁷ The concluding remarks of the World Health Organizations report on Alcohol are a simple summary of the enormous world-wide problem of alcohol.

Alcohol is not an ordinary commodity. While it carries connotations of pleasure and sociability in the minds of many, harmful consequences of its use are diverse and widespread. As documented in this report, globally, alcohol problems exert an enormous toll on the lives and communities of many nations, especially those in the developing world. Research has shown that when extrapolating from historical trends, the role of alcohol as a major factor in the burden of disease will be increasing in the future. Particularly worrying trends are the increases in average volume of drinking predicted for the most populous regions of the world (e.g., in

China and India) and the emerging trend of more harmful and risky patterns in drinking especially among young people.¹⁸

Our times are different from Bible times. Not only is the abuse of alcohol a significant social problem today, we know much more about its effects on society than were known in Bible times. It is clear that millions and millions of people are stumbling over alcohol and ruining their lives, their families, and their businesses. As followers of Jesus, we must care about this and must not only engage in providing help to the addicted, we need to make a social statement.

By way of comparison to the role of alcohol in our culture, the pagan cultures of the first century were saturated in religious idolatry and the church sought to ensure that Gentile believers, while not being required to take on all the Jewish customs that served to distinguish them from their pagan neighbours, did embrace some clear boundaries vis-a-vis the problem of idolatry. In like manner, given the emphasis placed upon alcohol in our society, abstinence will serve as a counter-cultural practice of radical non-conformity that indicates the pattern of the world is not controlling our actions. Abstinence offers an alternative example to the destructive reality of our “alcohol saturated” society.

As followers of Jesus, we are responsible to live our lives to a higher standard. A greater societal consciousness on the issues of alcohol consumption should be a mark of our thoughtful discipleship.

The Principle of Sacrificial Love: Love Limits Liberty

The question this paper addresses is whether the principle of not being a stumbling block to others can be applied with reference to drinking alcohol. For while all things are created by God and may be good not all things are good all the time (1 Timothy 4:4; Romans 14:20). Paul gives us reason for applying this principle to this matter in 1 Corinthians 10,

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God- even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).

It is better not to *eat meat* or *drink wine* or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall (Romans 14:21, emphasis added).

We have already noted that wine is a blessing of God as demonstrated in His provisions of life which included the produce of the grapevine. The question facing us relates to the rightness in drinking alcohol with reference to the effect it may have not only on the drinker, but also the impact it may have on others. In the Bible, the “weak” in the discussion about food offered to idols were the people who did not properly understand that the meat was good because it was created by God. As the discussion turns from what we eat to what we drink, there are some fundamental differences.

While Paul can affirm with conviction in Romans 14:14, “I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself.” When the focus shifts to wine, we are dealing with a substance that we know diminishes human cognitive, emotional, and physical abilities. It is also a known medical fact that alcohol has addictive qualities and many people succumb to its power and destructive tendencies. Certain individuals are particularly susceptible to the addictive nature of alcohol because of a genetic predisposition making them more likely to fall prey to alcohol’s destructive potential. Therefore there is an inherent difference between alcohol and meat.

In the alcohol discussion, the weak are not only those who are vulnerable to the temptations of alcohol but also those for whom alcoholism is a disease. Becoming a stronger brother is not just about a greater theological understanding. Weakness here can be understood as a physical disability. Therefore, the principles elucidated by Paul are applicable in the case of the consumption of alcohol. The modern context, one where alcohol is not only a destructive force in society but a recognized physical weakness, makes the issue of the “weaker” brother very pertinent.

An appeal for leaders to choose abstinence can be argued on the principle of sacrificial love which asks believers who are free from the power of alcohol to abstain for the sake of those amongst us who may suffer the disease of alcoholism, for the sake of our youth who are under great peer pressure to conform to an image that is a lie and for the sake of those who do not know Christ who may be led to stumble by our moderate use of alcohol.

This principle of “redemptive love” should motivate us to sacrifice our freedom willingly. As leaders we must at times make choices that are costly. We must choose generosity over stinginess, we must choose to give our time and life for the sake of the lost over selfishness and in this case, we should choose abstinence over moderation.

Our motivation is not separation for the sake of being distinct. We are not reacting against culture in order to be different. Rather, we are distinct because we are like our God, and because we are filled with the Spirit of love. And love will act in radical ways. We are motivated primarily, then, not by legalism or our past rules, but by a deep love for other humans. We are people of the Spirit and having encountered the Spirit of love, we live with a new attitude toward those around us.

Concluding Observations: For the Sake of Others, Do Not Drink

This paper has offered reasons for the PAOC to maintain its expectation that credential holders will not consume alcohol. We have offered two primary reasons. First, we live in an alcohol saturated society where alcohol destroys families and individuals on a significant scale. Therefore, we offer the avoidance of all consumption of alcohol as a cultural alternative that will protect people from the inherent dangers associated with the abuse of alcohol. Second, we have suggested that limiting our liberty in this manner is a biblical principle elucidated by Scripture. We are called to lay down our lives for the sake of our brother as the supreme act of love.

Alcohol is a mind-altering drug. Judgment and cognitive capacity is quickly blurred with minimal alcohol intake. The laws of our land recognize this and have almost zero tolerance for any drinking and driving. It is recognized that even a little alcohol takes its toll on our mental alertness and physical reactions. It takes little alcohol before one's natural ability to make quick decisions and respond with appropriate action becomes sluggish. It is evident that clarity of moral restraint is dulled through the effect of alcohol on mind and body. It is clear that alcohol can hinder us from our call to do the will of God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. And when our consumption of alcohol causes our weaker brother to stumble, we have not loved him as our self in keeping with the second greatest commandment.

The current appeal for abstinence is not based on the conclusion that the Bible directly prohibits drinking anything alcoholic, but that the Bible instructs leaders, the strong in faith, to limit their liberties and make sacrifices for the sake of others. This is done for the sake of both the weak in Christ, particularly young people, who are potentially placed in danger by our example and for those who need deliverance from the scourge of one of our world's greatest problems.

Since alcohol in Canada is a serious drug problem and our children and young people continually live under peer pressure to make it a central focus of their life, we call for sacrifice by leaders who are to be models of self-control and sensitive to the temptations of those who look up to them.

Our cultural context and the cultural context of the wider world in which we live and work is facing an epidemic of alcohol abuse and this epidemic places the weaker among us in danger. The mark of a radical follower of Jesus is "non-conformity" to the pattern of the world. We need to reflect a radical discipleship that will demonstrate a counter culture life.

When a gift from God has been turned into a curse, it is the church that must offer an alternative way of life. Our alternative is to abstain from alcohol. We live in a world with so many good options that enable to us "eat, drink and be merry!" Alcohol is now an unnecessary commodity with which to enjoy the goodness of God. There is a huge potential for the downside of alcohol with very little gain with respect to its capacity to make the heart glad. We live in a time when there are so many ways to enjoy creation, it seems very foolish to choose a method which such a large potential downside. Therefore, church leaders should be ready to limit personal "freedom." Such a limitation of liberty demonstrates acceptance of the majestic Christian principle that the rights and needs of others have a higher status than our own liberties to enjoy the creation of God.

"For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:33).

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Endnotes

¹ The traditional attitude towards the use of alcohol among Pentecostals is found in an editorial titled “The Curse of Liquor” in *The Pentecostal Testimony* (15 October 1942, 3 – presumably written by PAOC General Superintendent D. N. Buntain):

All Pentecostal folk know that one can travel around the world and never be asked to take a drink of intoxicating liquor by any of the millions of saved members of this Movement. When one finds Christ as his Saviour and seeks to follow His will, he bids good-bye to all intoxicating drinks. What a deliverance! What a joy to be saved from the world and all it offers to craving, hungry, needy men! The Bible, however, tells us that we are our brother’s keeper. So, whilst we do not need any teaching from our pulpits for the guidance of the truly saved in the matter of intemperance, we have a duty towards the unsaved. To this end we should sound a warning from time to time against the drink demon which seeks to enslave all who may come within its reach.

Major fraternal Pentecostal organizations also have clear anti-alcohol positions. Examples are as follows:

Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri

http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_4187_abstinence.pdf

For two reasons we urge all believers to avoid the Satanic tool of alcohol which destroys lives, damns souls, and blights society: (1) A studied review of the Scriptures affirms a stern warning against intoxicating drink and a call to separation from this evil for the purpose of better service to God and mankind; and (2) Current social abuses and the public outrage over the high cost of alcohol in terms of human misery, death, and destruction of property cry out with urgency for the church of Jesus Christ to oppose firmly any use whatsoever of a beverage which so insidiously afflicts and binds the bodies and minds of men and women.

Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee

<http://www.churchofgod.org/index.php/practical-commitments/behavioral-temperance>

One of the primary benefits of our liberty in Christ is freedom from the domination of negative forces (John 8:32, 36; Romans 6:14; 8:2). We are counseled not to put ourselves again under bondage (Galatians 5:1). Therefore, a Christian must totally abstain from all alcoholic beverages and other habit-forming and mood-altering chemical substances and refrain from the use of tobacco in any form, marijuana and all other addictive substances, and further, must refrain from any activity (such as gambling or gluttony) which defiles the body as the temple of God or which dominates and enslaves the spirit that has been made free in Christ (Proverbs 20:1; 23:20-35; Isaiah 28:7; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 5:11; 6:10; 2 Corinthians 7:1; James 1:21).

International Pentecostal Holiness Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

[http://www.ipcc.cc/position%20statements.htm#ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, & DRUGS](http://www.ipcc.cc/position%20statements.htm#ALCOHOL,_TOBACCO,_&_DRUGS)

With these realities about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, the argument for abstinence is well established. The Christian is called to a higher standard of self-control and self-denial concerning those

things not beneficial to his physical and spiritual well being. To argue for any level of “moderate use” of alcohol, narcotics, or tobacco is to be insensitive to the weight of Scripture and the present perils of our society. Christians realize the pressing need for a pure testimony before our world. As the apostle Paul said, “I urge you ... in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1, 2).

Open Bible Standard Churches, Des Moines, Iowa

<http://www.hopeopenbible.net/vsItemDisplay.dsp&objectID=57BDF06F-99F7-45C4-ABF7DEB18A39AA72&method=display>

The historic position of Open Bible Standard Churches concerning the use of alcohol and tobacco has been one of abstinence. We hereby publicly reaffirm that position with regard to OBS believers in the United States of America.

² All biblical quotations are from the New International Version (1984, 2011) unless otherwise noted.

³ While Evangelical Christians who relate to Anabaptist and Holiness traditions advocate abstinence from drinking alcohol, some other branches of Christianity believe that the use of alcohol in moderation is quite acceptable. Judaism with its roots in the Hebrew Bible *requires* the use of alcoholic wine in religious ceremonies such as the *kiddush* [noting the sanctity of the day] and *havdallah* [marking the end of the occasion] at *Shabbat* and festivals in the Jewish calendar. Indeed, any *mitzvot* [good deed] may be celebrated with a glass of wine. Islam, the other “Abrahamic” religion, takes a different stance on the use of alcohol. Although Muslims have a degree of respect for the Bible, their abstinence is based upon a passage in the Quran: “They ask you [O Muhammad] about alcoholic drink and gambling. Say: “In them is great sin and [some] benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit” . . .” (Surah Al Baqarah 2:219). Philosophical religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism also take positions on the use of alcohol. Buddhists have scores of moral precepts which must be observed by monks and nuns but the list narrows to a minimum of five for lay Buddhists: (1) to avoid killing; (2) to avoid stealing; (3) to avoid sexual misconduct; (4) to avoid false speech; (5) to avoid alcohol and drugs. Hindus are less restrictive about the use of alcohol but do declare that Brahmins (the highest and priestly category in the caste system) must avoid the “The five grave sins [which are] . . . Drinking alcoholic liquors, killing a Brahmana, and the violation of the preceptor’s bed, . . . stealing gold and the theft of a Brahmanism property, . . . mingling with a fallen person.” <http://www.hinduism.co.za/sin.htm>

⁴ For a discussion of the Biblical words for “wine” please refer to Appendix I

⁵ “Proverbs 31:6-7 is possibly the most enigmatic biblical passage that mentions the use of alcohol. In this passage, the person referred to as King Lemuel is counseled to ‘Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more’ (NASB). The words ‘strong drink’ (*shekar*) and ‘wine’ (*yayin*) are the standard Hebrew words for alcoholic beverages. A casual reading of these verses can lead some to conclude that it is permissible to drink alcohol. Technically, they are correct. While this passage permits the use of alcohol, it is crucial that one take a closer look at just what is being said here.

First, the passage sets up a deliberate contrast between what the king should not do and what others can do. By use of literary structure, the king’s obligations regarding alcohol are made clear. In verse 4, the king is told, ‘It is not for kings to drink wine (*yayin*), or for rulers to desire strong drink (*shekar*)’ (Richard Lang and Barratt Duke, “The Christian and Alcohol” *Criswell Theological Review*, Spring 2008: 24-25).

⁶ The Greek word *asotia* translated as “debauchery” by the NIV in Ephesians 5:18 occurs in only two other verses in the NT: Titus 1:6, “wild” and 1 Peter 4:4, “dissipation” (NASB).

⁷ The examples of this are numerous in Paul’s letters, covering everything from women’s apparel (1 Timothy 2:9-10), to submission to government (Romans 13:1-6), avoiding sexual immorality and those who practice

such (1 Corinthians 5:1-12), lawsuits against fellow believers (1 Corinthians 6:1-11), and other miscellaneous guidelines (Ephesians 4:25–5.21). In Colossians, Paul on the one hand advocates freedom from certain human regulations (Colossians. 2:6-23) but then gives rules for Christian living (Colossians 3:1–4:6). Perhaps muddying the waters even more, Paul calls believers to live under the “law of Christ” (love) (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2). Elsewhere, he exhorts believers to avoid “lawlessness” (Romans 6:19, NASB). No wonder it is difficult to reconcile these types of Scriptures. Aside from this there is debate as to what, if any, laws have ceased to operate authoritatively for Christians. For example, are Christians obligated to follow OT moral laws, while being free from obligation to ceremonial and dietary laws? On this see Schreiner, “Law: II. In the New Testament,” 676-677.

⁸ At the same time, as N. T. Wright points out, we need to be very careful in adopting this line of reasoning. Principles are, after all, simply generalized laws. Certainly, being more general, principles can apply to more situations; but even then new historical and cultural contexts will inevitably arise in which the principles will seem awkward, not quite making sense and result in the denial of the liberty that grace brings. Seeking universal principles is, it seems, simply another way of subsuming grace under law – albeit more general laws. See N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*, 1st ed. New York: Harper One, 2010, 4-7.

⁹ “Young people from Europe do not drink more responsibly than young people from the United States, according to comparison data released today by the Justice Department’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). In comparison with young people in the United States:

- A greater percentage of young people from nearly all European countries report drinking in the past 30 days.
- A greater percentage of young people report having five or more drinks in a row.
- About half of the European countries have intoxication rates among young people that are higher than the intoxication rates in the United States.

Commonly, Europe is held up as an example where there are more liberal drinking age laws and attitudes that, in turn, foster more responsible styles of drinking by young people. It is often asserted that young Europeans learn to drink more responsibly than young people from the United States.” The following reports indicate that is a false assumption:

U.S. Department of Justice, *Youth Drinking Rates and Problems: A Comparison of European Countries and the United States*, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention), May 2005: 1-4.

World Health Organization *Global Status Report on Alcohol*, 2004: 11-12, 33-34.

¹⁰ Health Canada: “Drug and Alcohol Use Statistics” 2011. www.hc-sc.gc.ca

¹¹ Richard Lang and Barratt Duke. “The Christian and Alcohol,” *Criswell Theological Review*, Spring 2008, 21.

¹² MADD, “The Magnitude of the Alcohol/Drug-Related Crash Problem in Canada: Overview.” www.madd.ca/

¹³ Health Canada: “Drug and Alcohol Use Statistics” 2011. www.hc-sc.gc.ca

¹⁴ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: College Task Force. *College Drinking: Changing the Culture*, NIAAA, 2008.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Alcohol 2004*, 7
http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_status_report_2004_overview.pdf.

¹⁸ World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Alcohol 2004*, 73.