
Sipping Saints

By David Wilkerson

May 1, 1977 "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).

This nation is fast becoming a sodden society of too many intoxicated citizens. Alcohol is now the modern golden calf, and millions of people, young and old, male and female, have been seduced by it.

The teetotaler, the prohibitionists, and all the others who have for years fought against this flood of booze have been laughed out of existence. We laugh to scorn those old-fashioned little ladies who went around smashing barrels of whiskey and shutting down bars and honky-tonks, and taking pledges of abstinence.

We liberated moderns have made it fashionable to drink. It is now considered sophisticated, urbane, cool — to drink socially. Try saying "No" to the airline stewardess who keeps pushing drinks at you from the time you get on the airplane till you deplane. "What do you mean, no drinks?" She looks at you as some kind of kook for refusing free drinks.

People are offended nowadays when you refuse their offer of a complimentary drink. They try to make you feel unneighborly for not joining them, or that you are putting on a "holier than thou" attitude. Even President Carter couldn't keep drinks out of the White House.

"Be not among winebibbers..." (Proverbs 23:20).

To me, the real tragedy is that so many who call themselves "Christian" are now drinking. I call them "sipping saints," because that is how it all begins — one sip at a time. A recent poll revealed that 81% of all Catholics now drink and 64% of all Protestants. These shocking figures keep mounting higher each month. The permissive attitude toward social drinking is fast creeping even into the most conservative, evangelical church circles. I have spoken at Charismatic conventions where thousands of "Spirit-filled" saints of God lifted hands in praise and adoration to God — and after being dismissed, numbers of them walk out into the parking lot, open their car trunks and pull out a couple six-packs and pass them around to fellow worshipers. Others order mixed drinks with their restaurant meals, in between the praise sessions. They return to speak with "pickled tongues."

"And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands" (Isaiah 5:12).

The prophet Isaiah has a message for the entire Charismatic movement — in both Catholic and Protestant circles.

"God's people are in captivity to these things because of a lack of knowledge...But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness" (Isaiah 5:13-16).

The prophet Hosea said, "...wine and new wine take away the heart..." (Hosea 4:11).

This suggests that sipping saints have divided hearts.

Spirit-filled people lay claim to being "kings and priests" unto the Lord. The Bible emphatically states,

"It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink, lest they drink and forget the law..." (Proverbs 31:4,5).

The writer of Proverbs suggests happy, overcoming Christians don't need wine, that it is only for the depressed and dying.

"Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts" (Proverbs 31:6).

A fine Christian lady wrote to me saying:

"We are good church-going Christians. We love the Lord, and we see nothing at all wrong with serving wine in our home. We drink moderately, and our children are learning to drink under our supervision. They do not overindulge. We have never seen anyone drunk in our home. "You are simply trying to make us feel guilty and are pushing your fundamentalist morals on us. We were not raised under the legalistic taboos like you evidently were. Frankly? sir, our drinking habits are none of your concern."

God bless that dear lady — but one of these days it will be my business. It starts becoming my business when those teenagers go out with their friends and get stoned. Just today, one of my students, a converted alcoholic, told me how she became a drunkard. Her parents taught her how to drink moderately. At parties, birthdays, and when company came, everybody took a social drink. It was served at meals. She admired and loved her parents. They despised drunkenness, yet they had a bar in the house. This young lady started going to teenage parties and began to drink socially with her crowd. That led to drinking in clubs. Soon she was getting stoned in parked vans. Finally, when problems began to pile up, she began to lean on wine heavily. She ended up in a mental institution, a hard-core alcoholic. That same story is repeated to me over and over again from coast to coast. How many, many times I've heard it, "My parents were considered good Christians. They went to church. But we always served wine or beer at our house. My big brother drank moderately and he was my hero. I drank to be like my parents and big brother, but I couldn't handle it. But they made me think drinking was the thing all good people do."

Am I prejudiced? Narrow-minded on the subject? You bet I am! And I have reason to be. My own brother, a minister's son, started drinking beer moderately — just to be sociable with friends. He wound up a heavy drinker, leaving his wife and lovely children to pursue his habit. Thank God he is saved today and back with his family. But I sent my brother Jerry with a team of converts to Europe to testify about what Christ did in delivering him from the power of alcohol. The Christians in Europe gladly rejoiced in the testimonies of deliverance from dope and prostitution — but they didn't want to hear a word about Jerry's deliverance from alcohol. Why? Because European Christians guzzle wine and beer like water. It broke his heart. I have heard all the excuses for the drinking among Christians in Europe — and I can't accept any of them. They blame it on impure water. They talk about it being rooted in their culture and customs. They drink "because they have always done it." How deeply offended some of the pastors were in Paris, France, when I refused to drink their wine. American missionaries, who themselves easily adopted the European customs, told me I should "do as the Parisians do, while in Paris!" Yet, how deeply offended I was when some of these same ministers were so stoned they couldn't stay awake during my crusade. There is an alarming rate of alcoholism and heavy drinking in Christian circles in Europe. They do get drunk! They are not all moderate! None of their excuses make it right. And what phoniness for American Christians to drink "only in Europe."

They won't touch a drop here in the States, but they think it's "cute" to join the brethren over there in sipping a few!

I am deeply offended by drinking Christians because of the terrible example it sets for young people! This nation is now facing a plague of drinking among teenagers. The two most popular words in school today are "cruising and boozing." Drunkenness is spreading in our schools like a wildfire out of control. Kids tell me that as many as 80% of their class not only drink, but get stone drunk. We face the possibility of having over one million young alcoholics next year. I've been helping drug addicts for 20 years. But this drinking rage now sweeping our nation frightens me. They drink now because they think alcohol won't "waste" them like drugs! Booze is now the preferred "liquid pot." Everywhere you see teenagers getting stoned, they tell you — "No cops, no parents, no politicians can hassle us now — because they are all doing it, too. We finally found a kick that won't put us behind bars!"

I don't want to get involved in that age-old argument about the Bible and fermented wine as opposed to grape juice. But the more I see of these bombed-out, broken-down, hopelessly drunken young people — the more I am convinced Jesus did not mock that crowd at Canaan's wedding feast with the same stuff that is destroying our youth today. Christ came to fulfill the law! The law says, "Wine is a mocker...whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." Was Christ deceived? Would he have served a drink that would have led to a man leaving a feast drunken to heat up his wife? And in court that man is asked, "How did you get so drunk?" And the convicted man answers, "I went to a wedding feast. Jesus of Nazareth served up a really strong drink. He got me drunk."

I can't conceive that Jesus would mock that crowd and serve a drink that could have been abused if taken immoderately. I believe that elixir Jesus served was the pure juice of the vine — a supernatural punch so full of nature's true blend, it was a unique and welcome change! Would Jesus add alcoholic content to His supernatural drink and make it "bite the cup" when the law said "Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright..." (Proverbs 23:31)?

That was written by a king who had "given himself over to wine" (Ecclesiastes 2:3). And Christ would have never, never given the guests over to wine that was intoxicating.

Paul knew the law, too. He revered the wisdom of Solomon. Pure juice of the grape is good for the health! It is nutritious. But fermented wine is not more nutritious, according to a doctor friend of mine who is well read on the subject. How could Paul recommend drinking alcoholic wine when the law he respected so warned, "...be not among winebibbers..."?

But the real issue is not whether or not the New Testament refers to fermented wine or grape juice. The real issue is the abuse of it that is so prevalent today. Solomon had three thousand wives. At one time, Moses permitted divorce. God winked! But God does not wink when His laws become so perverted and abused. Look where our permissiveness has led us. So-called Christian discos, featuring beer drinking and dancing to Christian music. Rocking, rolling, drinking "Christians." "...Lest they drink and forget the law..."

We are forgetting the laws of God, the very laws Jesus said He came to fulfill. We now allow a lesbian priest to be ordained in the Episcopal church. Homosexuals not only flaunt their sins, they boldly seek recognition and power within the church. One million new divorces this year. Ten million kids victims of broken homes. Nude dancing in the church sanctuary. Liberal ministers mock old-fashioned biblical sex standards. They now tell our kids, "Masturbation is a gift from God to relieve your

tensions." And the lawlessness to end all lawlessness, some of our church agencies have been serving as fronts for anti-God, Communistic anarchists seeking to destroy democracy — using the churches' missions money to engage in covert acts of violence.

Do Christians drink because of ignorance? Has no one challenged them by the Word of God? Do these new converts from the Jesus movement drink to prove they are liberated and not under law?

A young lady, a member of a Christian love commune, wrote to me recently and said, "Sure, we all drink. Jesus did; Paul did! The Bible is not down on it. Our leaders drink moderately. They are good Bible teachers and they travel, speaking at youth gatherings." Yes — and I happen to know some of them also smoke. They mix Jesus with their heavy rock music, and only God knows where the compromise ends.

They seem to think that adding the word "Jesus" to anything sanctifies it and makes it all right.

You say — "Don't judge, David! What about the beam in your own eye?" I am not anyone's judge. I have not set myself up as some kind of spokesman for any group. But Paul said, "We judge those within — God judges those without."

It's time judgment was called for! It's time all drinking Christians were challenged! It's time for the Holy Spirit to expose the looseness, the slaphappy "anything goes" attitude. If it's wrong for my dear converted alcoholics and addicts and prostitutes to drink, even moderately, then it is deadly wrong for mature Christians to drink and set a poor example for them.

And I get very weary and spiritually indignant when drinking Christians come back at me with — "Aw, you're just a fundamentalist, law bound, moral do-gooder. We modern, liberated Christians are free in Christ. We are not under law. We will not be bound by your attacks on our freedom." That offends everything in me that yearns for godliness and holiness. That offends every young convert whom God has convicted of past drinking habits. And the Bible says "But whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matthew 18:6-7).

I refuse to give in to the mounting pressures of worldliness — in the disguise of spiritual freedom! What has happened to us, saints of God — when we can sit idly by and not rebuke the fast eroding morals in the house of God? I believe in free grace, but not licentiousness. I believe in the imputed righteousness of Christ, by faith. But I also believe the holiness of God demands that we "touch not that which is unclean." I also believe that smoking ministers are not being honest with God. These "puffing prophets" refuse to practice what they preach. And drinking ministers are a reproach to the name and power of God. It is not an effort to condemn true ministers of the gospel. But how can we as ministers and parents ask our kids to quit using drugs and alcohol, if we will not clean up our own lives — and set a Christ-like example?

At times, just for a fleeting moment, I think to myself, "Maybe I'm the one who is wrong. Maybe these new Christians who rock, roll, smoke, drink, and who go back to their old haunts to sing, entertain, and perform — maybe they have seen something in God I haven't yet seen. Maybe all these fast changes aren't compromise, but a sign of maturity and growth. Maybe I am too old-fashioned — too out of it to recognize some new thing God is doing." But then I begin to compare the rollicking,

boisterous sounds of their music with the old songs like "The Old Rugged Cross," and "Holy, Holy, Holy." Then I want to cry! I look at them going back into those smoke-filled clubs to entertain the drinking crowd on the pretense of taking Jesus with them, and then I compare them with all the millions of God's people over the centuries from the martyrs on down to the converted addicts and gangs of today, who forsook the world and all its associations to take on the reproach of Christ. I begin to weep for those compromised Christians. I know I am not wrong.

Please don't get mad at me! If you are one of the sipping saints — don't allow your hurt or anger to rob you of the truth. If you find yourself resenting this message of separation — it is probably because God has already convicted you — and He is now wanting you to enjoy complete freedom.

Pray also that God will lay it on the hearts of ministers all over the nation — to take a bold stand in their pulpits against these insidious trends.

Pray for our teenagers! The pressures on them to drink with the crowd are getting worse daily. They need to be encouraged to stand up and resist, lest they be drawn into this whirlpool of drunkenness.

Even if you don't "feel convicted" — abstain for the simple but powerful reason of setting an example for the youth!

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things" (Proverbs 23:29-33).