

# Is Alcohol Use Among Christians the New Golden Calf?

by Shane Idleman

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*This sermon warns against the dangers of regular alcohol use among Christians, highlighting the fine line between freedom and sin, and the need to guard against compromise and preserve our testimony and love for God.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 23:20, Luke 7:35, Romans 14:21, Galatians 5:13, 1 Timothy 3:3, 1 Peter 2:16

**Topics:** "Alcohol Abuse", "Christian Liberty"

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## Description

Shane Idleman addresses the delicate balance between freedom and sin, responsibility and carelessness when it comes to alcohol consumption, emphasizing the dangers of over-indulgence and its potential disqualification from leadership roles. He highlights the devastating impact of alcohol abuse on families and society, citing alarming trends of addiction among Christian leaders and the seductive nature of alcoholism in today's culture. Idleman urges for a closer examination of the spiritual implications of alcohol abuse, cautioning against flaunting liberty at the expense of God's grace and the well-being of others.

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## Transcript

The person who consumes alcohol walks a very fine line between freedom and sin, responsibility and carelessness, liberty and abuse--over-indulgence can even disqualify a person from leadership (cf. 1 Timothy 3). This discussion is not about a glass of wine or beer now and then, it's about abusing liberty. Damage done to families and individuals through alcohol use demands a closer look. Almost one out of every three traffic deaths involve someone who was driving while intoxicated. (My wife's brother was killed in 2000 because of a drunk driver.)

Pastor John MacArthur states what many of us feel but seldom discuss, "It is puerile and irresponsible for any pastor to encourage the recreational use of intoxicants--especially in church-sponsored activities. The ravages of alcoholism and drug abuse in our culture are too well known, and no symbol of sin's bondage is more seductive or more oppressive than booze." I couldn't agree more. The trend of young Christian leaders consuming alcohol on a regular basis is alarming. Many will look back and regret the damage that was done to lives, churches, and their own testimony.

Pastor Darrin Patrick, in his book Church Planter, writes, "As I coach and mentor church planters and pastors, I am shocked at the number of them who are either addicted or headed toward addiction to

alcohol." David Wilkerson adds, "Alcohol is now the modern golden calf, and millions of people, young and old, male and female, have been seduced by it." Many counseling appointments are because of alcohol and drug abuse. Add to that the amount of domestic violence cases and the number of abused children because of alcohol, and we would be remiss to ignore its dangers.

Alcohol abuse, among other addictions, presents a sad commentary on the spiritual condition of the church today. We often flaunt liberty and laugh in the face of God's grace by posting our favorite beer brands and wines on Facebook, all under the guise of "exercising liberty." While Romans 14 discusses personal freedoms, it also has strong warnings "not to do anything that will cause others to fall" (vs. 21).

Consider the following:

The Bible never encourages crossing the line. With today's promotion and acceptance of alcohol, many easily cross the line. A preoccupation with alcohol is just one indicator of alcoholism; a preoccupation with drinking at events or social gatherings is another. Some even bring out their private collection of hard liquor after having a few drinks. This is not liberty; it's addiction. We assume that the alcohol content today is the same as in Jesus' day. In His day, a little water was often placed into the wine and thus decreased the alcohol content (cf. 1 Timothy 5:23)...much like an O'douls today.

"Strong drink" were drinks with higher alcohol content that led to drunkenness. Ale beer, for example, often has two or three times more alcohol than normal beer. Those having two ale beers may have the equivalent of six regular beers. "Jesus ate and drank with sinners." "But there is no suggestion in Scripture that Jesus purposely assumed the look and lifestyle of a publican in order to gain acceptance..." (John MacArthur). We should fellowship without engaging in the practices of a secular lifestyle.

The world will know that we are Christians by our love and by our convictions, not by how well we imitate the world around us. We seldom hear non-Christians say, "I'm turned off by Christians because they seldom compromise." But we do hear, "Christians who say one thing and do another really turn me off." Guarding against compromise isn't just a good idea, it's absolutely necessary when it comes to preserving our testimony. "Be not among winebibbers..." (Proverbs 23:20). It has been suggested that Jesus drank often.

Not true. We find only purposeful incidents of Jesus having wine over the course of three years, and not very often. Today, many Christians center everything around alcohol--fellowship, events, birthdays, bible studies, etc. When alcohol is the center of attention, it becomes an idol and an addiction. This is why many will be offended by this article. Jesus was filled with the Spirit...holiness flowed from every area of His life. This cannot be said of those who consume alcohol regularly.

What is the fruit of today's preoccupation with alcohol? Conversations often turn away from God, if they were there to begin with. We begin to compromise our time and interests; we'd rather head to Vegas than a prayer meeting. Jesus said that "wisdom is justified by her children" (cf. Luke 7:35). The harmful fruit that results from a lifestyle focused on alcohol is proof enough. In Jesus' day, society was much more isolated. We cannot calculate how many people are affected by today's social media.

A person with 500 "friends" may be encouraging dozens to stumble. It is the selfless motivation of love that keeps us from causing others to stumble (cf. Romans 14). 1 Peter 2:16 reminds us that many use liberty to hide sin: "A cloak for vice," and Galatians 5:13 says we should not "use our freedom to indulge the flesh." If these points raise concerns, I encourage honest repentance: "Lord, I've been wrong...remove

my carnality, crush my pride, draw me closer to You. I repent of my sin and turn completely and unconditionally to you."

In our freedom, we can become a liability to ourselves, others, and the message of the gospel. Its often not "if" alcohol consumption causes damage but "when." Why would we willingly walk into the enemy's camp?

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