



VERSE OF THE WEEK

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Alcohol and Office

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“Wine is a Mocker,” Jan Steen 1626–1679, Norton Simon Museum.

As you know I regularly frequent the book of Proverbs. Of the 66 books of the Bible, this one is perhaps the most applicable for those choosing to live their lives under scrutiny in the capital. Solomon, king of Israel, is instructing his son, Rehoboam, on how to live skillfully in governmental leadership. Much can be gained from the topical study of this book. *Alcohol and Office* is one of those subjects that needs special consideration. Read on, my friends.

Ralph Drollinger

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

- Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff: Wednesdays 7am, Zoom.
- Senate Members: Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served.
- House Members: Thursdays 8am, The Capitol Hill Club, hot breakfast served.

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♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

1 Corinthians 10:31

Whether, then, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.



Nothing should be practiced that impairs a person's ability to reason and judge with biblical precepts.



I. INTRODUCTION

Long ago, with the help of one of my seminary professors, I began outlining and developing theologically the 31 chapters of the book of Proverbs. This Old Testament (OT) book contains 915 Proverbs which my professor had already divided into six main divisions for exhaustive study:

1. Spiritual Wisdom
2. Personal Wisdom
3. Family Wisdom
4. Intellectual Wisdom
5. Marketplace Wisdom
6. Societal Wisdom

I then developed 87 subcategories and exhaustive outlines under these six main divisions. What came out of this three-year exercise are studies for public servants that will afford you an opportunity to grow in personal wisdom in many pertinent, practical areas. This study, under the category of personal wisdom, tackles *Alcohol and Office*.

What follows is all that Proverbs has to say about alcohol. As much as this beverage is available in the capital community—especially during free receptions and dinners—it can become your greatest enemy because it can lead to ruin. A special word is in order here: partaking of everything that is “free” is not in your best interest. Do not be like the kid in the candy store without self-control. The surrealism of the capital environment coupled with being away from home can corrupt you faster than you think.

Remember the words of the Apostle Paul who said, *I discipline my body and make it my slave* (1 Corinthians 9:27). I have noticed that those who are without personal discipline do not function well here—especially when it comes to booze and food. The following is what Solomon had to say regarding alcohol to his son who would someday lead the nation.

II. THE PRESENT FRUITS OF FERMENTATION

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise (20:1).

Biblical history records that since the days of Noah (Genesis 9:21), the love of wine and strong drink have deceived and shamed many. **Mocker** has the idea of “scoffing,” and **brawler** carries the meaning of “being violent, loud and uncontrollable.” What’s doubly sad is that these fruits of the fermented grape, so to speak, overcome a drinking individual before he is aware of it, all the while failing to deliver the pleasure he is seeking.

Noah is an example of one who drank excessively from his own vineyard. He soon lost respect and dignity in the sight of his inner family. Notice the extrapolation of this fact in Proverbs 23:29–35:

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things and your mind will utter perverse things. And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the top of a mast. “They struck me, but I did not become ill; they beat me, but I did not know it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.”

A person’s governing reason is lost when alcohol is used wrongly. In place of reason are lust, appetite, and passion. As a result, the heart *utters perverse things*. It’s not surprising that in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul commands, *And do not get drunk with wine* (Ephesians 5:18).



III. THE FUTURE FRUITS OF FERMENTATION

The effects on the overall direction a person charts for his or her life is a secondary result of indulging:

Listen, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe one with rags (23:19–21).

So much of Proverbs talks about how those with whom you choose to fellowship will affect your life. Proverbs 4:14–17 states:

Do not enter the path of the wicked and do not proceed in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not pass by it; turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; and they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.

Hanging out with wicked people quickly loosens a person's attachment to instruction. Cultivating such relationships quickly forsakes the way of God. The results over the long term are a lack of personal productivity, *poverty*, and *clothing oneself with rags*. Skid row serves to illustrate this truth; a majority of those on our nation's streets suffer from alcoholism. The following Proverb underscores this actuality:

He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not become rich (21:17).

Herein is a biblical insight that should guide policy formation on the same.

The root solution to poverty has more to do with the

formation of Christ's character in individuals than in meeting their personal needs.

Woefully inadequate are policies to overcome poverty that fail to consider the aforementioned Solomonic truths. This insight also underscores why the institution of the church is so much better equipped to handle the plight of poverty than is the institution of the state. The church is designed by God to address the issues of the heart, where, in a majority of cases, the real problem lies.

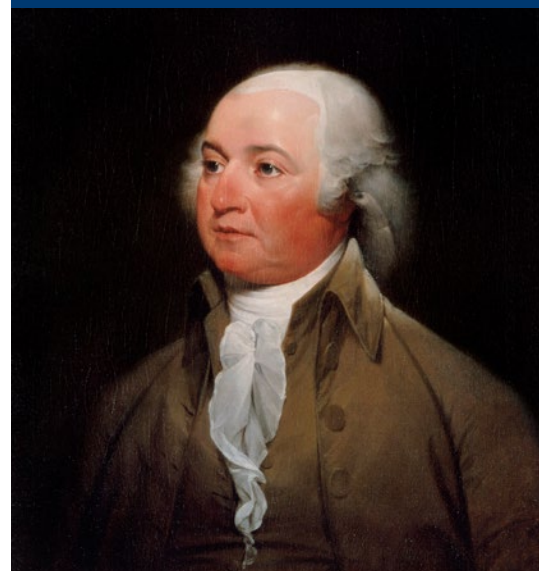
IV. FERMENTATION AND LEADERS

It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink, for they will drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted (31:4b–5).

In the book of Esther, King Xerxes was drunk and ordered his wife to come before his eunuchs *to display her beauty to the people and the princes* (1:11). When King Herod asked for the head of John the Baptist, his request took place in the middle of a feast (Mark 6:21). Both serve to illustrate the truth of this Proverb in terms of state leadership. The drunkenness of Elah, king of Israel, and Ben-hadad, king of Syria (cf. 1 Kings 16:8–9; 20:16; Hosea 7:5) serve to illustrate the same behavior.

When rulers—both kings and priests—desire strong drink, they *forget what was decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted*. It follows that one of the qualifications for spiritual leadership in the church is leaders *not addicted to wine* (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). No leader in any of God's ordained institutions can afford to have a mind clouded by substance. The point of this principle is that such behavior in a leader negatively impacts others. The leader must have a higher standard.

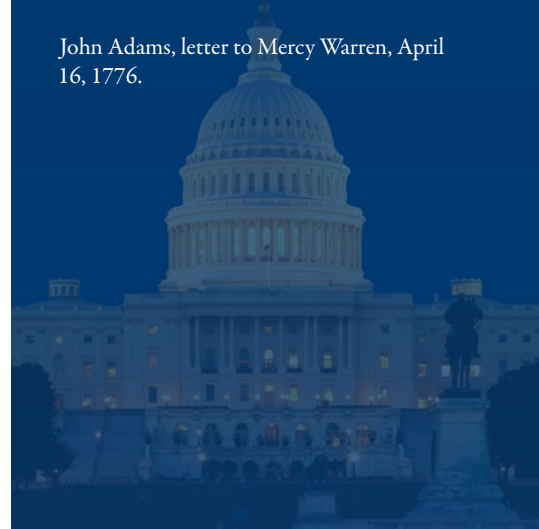
John Adams



“Men must be ready, they must pride themselves and be happy to sacrifice their private pleasures, passions and interests, nay, their private friendships and dearest connections, when they stand in competition with the rights of society.”

— John Adams, second President of the United States, signer of the Declaration of Independence, judge, diplomat, one of two signers of the Bill of Rights.

John Adams, letter to Mercy Warren, April 16, 1776.





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Often throughout Scripture, drunkenness and adultery, or other sexual sins appear side by side, indicating the quick downward spiral for both secular and sacerdotal leaders who practice substance abuse that inevitably leads to shameful activities. Intemperance is unseemly as it turns a leader into a beast. And to lose respect in leadership is to lose leadership. Guard it! Keep your integrity at all times! You were elected to serve others—not indulge yourself!

Notice that the following Proverb directly proceeds from the previous one given in verses 4 and 5:

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 (31:6–7).

Whereas drink is not for kings, it does have its use. Psalm 104:15 states **wine which makes a man’s heart glad**. Such is illustrated by the Samaritan who gave drink to the wounded traveler in Luke 10:34. Paul prescribed it to his ailing understudy, Timothy, stating **No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments (1 Timothy 5:23)**.

Conclusively, to drink wine was not a sin in the OT (cf. Deuteronomy 14:26) but drunkenness was (cf. Isaiah 28:7). So it is in New Testament times. This teaching of Proverbs regarding wine is illustrative of **selflessness**. Rather than personally indulging, alcohol can be prudently prescribed for medicinal and other conservative purposes when necessary. Here then is the principle of self-denial and service of others.

V. CONCLUSION

The Scriptures do not state hard and fast that any consumption of alcohol is sinful, but it does repeatedly warn against the sin of drunkenness and its results. The stakes are much higher as this principle relates to leaders. Nothing should be practiced that impairs a person’s ability to reason and judge with biblical precepts. Therefore, the leader’s standard should be higher—not only because he deals in intellectual property, but for reasons of example. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:31, **Whether, then, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**

May God give you self-control and great wisdom when it comes to alcohol.

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