

Wine, Women, and Psalm¹



Take your consecrated hatchets, rocks and brickbats,
and everything that comes handy, and you can clean this curse out!
Don't wait for the ballots! Smash! Smash!

*Carry Nation*²

The effects of the Victorian era on men are probably nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the temperance movement. This was a moral crusade whose theological basis was, in fact, the revival of an ancient heresy. The wounds it sought to heal would, in its wake, actually open and fester even further. The accepted gender image of the Victorian male as a spiritually inferior agent, no longer capable of being responsible for the moral climate of home and society, made him powerless to resist the assault of a moral crusade aimed directly at him. What started out as a legitimate attempt to protect homes by curbing existing abuse ended up as an implicit crusade against masculinity. And when the smoke cleared, men were more emasculated than ever before.

If you are among the many Protestant Christians who believe in total abstention from liquor as a tenet of your faith, please bear with me as I examine the scriptural basis and historical development of the temperance movement. You may be surprised at what you read.

There is no doubt about it--in nineteenth-century America, irresponsible male drinking was on the increase. With all the pressures, stress, and personal anxiety arising from the loss of

¹ The following is Chapter 7 of [*MISSING FROM ACTION, A Powerful Historical Response To The Crisis Among American Men*](#), Weldon Hardenbrook, Concillar Press, Second Edition, 1996. While the author is an Orthodox cleric and clearly display bias toward that religious tradition, the subject matter of the book is universal in nature and cuts across denominational lines.

² Herbert Asbury, *Carry Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929),p. 108.

patriarchy and the rise of industrialization, men began to spend more and more time in the taverns. To them, the tavern increasingly became a refuge from the humiliation of being under their wives' moral guidance at home. It also represented a place of male fellowship where men could overcome loneliness by exchanging stories, challenges, and jokes within the company of other men. The pub, tavern, or saloon increasingly became the drinking trough where American males tightened their grip to reserve what seemed to them to be some small semblance of manhood. But more than that, after men left the church, the tavern became almost the sole meeting-place for males outside of the workplace. The tavern had replaced the church as a fortress of fellowship for men. And it is true that, while in the taverns, men increasingly drank to excess.

But there is something that we must understand very clearly. Up to this point in America's history, every American--preacher, Puritan and pagan alike--had participated in some way in the cultural ritual of consuming alcoholic beverages of some kind. It had been that way since the pilgrims landed. Rum and beer came over on the Mayflower. Household production of beer and wine went on in the vast majority of colonial homes. Abstinence was virtually unheard of. Drunkenness was dealt with severely, but everybody drank. Norman H. Clark writes:

In colonial America, alcohol was vital to the myriad social and cultural expectations which colonists had brought with them from England and Western Europe. It was universally honored as a medicine for almost every physiological malfunction, whether temporary or permanent, real or imagined. But even more, it was *aqua vitae*, the water of life, and the "good creature of God."³

When many Americans today think about Puritans, they think about people who had laws against everything. However true this may or may not be, one thing is certain--there were no prohibitions against alcohol consumption, apart from the local ordinances against drunkenness.

In their laws, many of the colonies referred to alcoholic beverages as the "good creature of God." Everybody drank some--men and women. Even children were allowed to partake of small quantities under the watchful eyes of their fathers. Liquor was used for medicine for the aged and infirm, and to quiet restless babies. Those few who refused it were looked upon with suspicion. Herbert Asbury remarks, "The occasional abstainer was considered a crackpot and generally shunned."⁴

There was a time when businesses and offices closed throughout the colonies so that the people could gather at the pubs. This was called "the Seven O'Clock Bitters." Taverns were the gathering place on Saturday afternoons for the discussion of politics, religion, and current events.

If there was any opposition to drinking, it was aimed at hard liquors. But overwhelmingly, ministers themselves, while preaching appeals for strict "moderation," always gave a good

³ Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976), p. 14.

⁴ Herbert Asbury, *The Great Illusion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1950), p. 4.

word for beer and wine. Even the famous Puritan clergymen Increase Mather and his son, Cotton, while crying out against intemperance, "admitted that a well-conducted tavern was an important asset to any town or village, and acknowledged the value of ardent spirits when used in moderation ... and called the fermented fruit of the vine 'a mystical integration of blessing and necessity.'"⁵

The Puritan clergyman participated with his parishioners in the cordial welcome of a toast and drink when he made his calls. Norman Clark observes:

None condemned the beneficialness of alcohol when it was used as God intended. Until well after the American Revolution, to refuse a drink in New England was to deny God, reject fellowship, and stand as a fool before custom and medicine.⁶

With so much home brew, the rise of numerous distilleries in the colonies, and the flow of rum (the favorite drink of the New World), there were, of course, a few abusers. Occasionally, these were made a public spectacle. Asbury reports:

Violators of these laws [against drunkenness] were fined, whipped, confined in the stocks or pillory, and, in extreme cases, expelled from the colony. In Massachusetts a man who had been convicted several times of drunkenness was compelled to wear, dangling from his neck, a large "D" painted in red upon a white cloth; or a large placard pinned to the back of his coat and emblazoned "A DRUNKARD."⁷

By all accounts, though, this display of punishment was not a common sight. American colonists viewed alcoholic beverages as their European forefathers had- as a gift from God, to be enjoyed, but not abused. Even for the Christian community--as for their Reformation fathers, Luther and Calvin--drinking was a part of normal Christian living. While vehemently against drunkenness, men held to the biblical proclamations (see, for example, Proverbs 23:32; Psalm 104:15; 1 Timothy 5:23; 1 Corinthians 11:17-22; Luke 7:33, 34) and they drank in moderation. Typical of the prevailing view of the colonial era was that expressed by Increase Mather in 1673: "Drink is in itself a good creature of God, and to be received with thankfulness. But the abuse of drink is from Satan, the wine is from God, but the Drunkard is from the Devil."⁸

But in time a new problem arose. As men became inebriated with the spirit of independence, weighed down with the demands of industrialization, and bereft of the guidance of the church, drunkenness rather than moderation became a tacitly acknowledged sign of male virility and a rite of passage for many men. As the Victorian era dawns, we find men, especially the most eminent Protestant theologian and preacher of his day, the Rev. Lyman Beecher, calling for a return to moderation.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶ Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil*, p. 16.

⁷ Asbury, *The Great Illusion*, p. 20.

⁸ Mark Edward Lender and Martin James Kirby, *Drinking in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), p. 1.

On February 13, 1826, a fellow named Justin Edwards gathered a group of seventeen men who had been inspired by the temperance lectures of the Rev. Beecher. These men, who were prominent social figures in Boston, included seven clergymen. At this time, says Asbury, they "organized the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance, which soon became known as the American Temperance Society."⁹

The original pledge of the American Temperance Society called for moderation in drinking. Later on, a new pledge was offered to members which promised total abstinence. The members were listed on the rolls as "O.P. --Old Pledge" or "T--Total." Those who signed for total abstinence from hard liquor became known as "T-totalers," the nickname later to be used for all those who abstained from all alcoholic beverages.

From Moderation to Obliteration

All of the most famous temperance leaders, such as Dr. Benjamin Rush, the Rev. Lyman Beecher, and the Rev. Justin Edwards, focused their war against the use of hard liquors, while allowing moderate use of beer and wine-again, consistent with the distinction between "drink" and "strong drink" in the Bible.

They focused their campaign against distilled liquors because hard liquor had a much higher alcohol content than beer or wine. The abuse of these distilled spirits was often what was involved in the increase of drunkenness. While these men acknowledged abstinence as an option, their goal was moderation. And, according to their writings, none of them even considered the possibility of these alcoholic beverages being somehow inherently evil.

But gradually a critical transition took place. The war began to be waged against all alcoholic beverages, including beer and wine. The major obstacle that the teetotalers had to overcome was the fact that the Holy Bible used the term "wine." In the mind of the teetotaler, wine in the Scriptures had to go. And that is when the new theory of fermented versus unfermented wine (i.e., grape juice) made its debut upon the American religious scene.

This "two wine theory," "good" wine and "bad" wine, was first introduced in the early 1800s by the President of Union College at Schenectady, New York, Dr. Eliphalet Nott. This Presbyterian pastor called for the banishment of all alcoholic beverages (including wine) from the face of the earth. He based this call on his claim that the "wine" in the Bible was not really wine at all.

"Dr. Nott was the first to assert in a serious way the claim that the Bible recognized both kinds of wine, sanctioning the use of the latter only; and from his advocacy of this opinion dates the Bible Wine controversy," reports the *Cyclopedia of Temperance and Prohibition*.¹⁰ Nott, implying that he had discovered a truth which had been hidden from the Church and Christian society for over eighteen hundred years, pleaded with Christians to give up even moderate drinking. Nott claimed he had made

⁹ Asbury, *The Great Illusion*, p. 33.

¹⁰ *Cyclopedia of Temperance and Prohibition* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1891), p. 457.

the great discovery that drunkenness is caused by drinking-moderate, temperate, continuous drinking--and that entire sobriety can be restored and maintained by abstinence, a discovery which, simple and obvious as it seems to be, had been hid for the ages, during which no one dreamed that mere drinking, regular, reputable, temperate drinking, injured anyone.... By this great discovery it has been made apparent that it is not drunkards but moderate drinkers with whom the temperance reformation is chiefly concerned; for it is not on a change of habit in the former, but the latter, on which the destiny of the State and the nation stands suspended.¹¹

The issue was no longer controlling the passions of the flesh [or "*mortifying the deeds of the flesh*"]. Alcohol was now identified as the "enemy."

Thus, out of the Protestant movement, segments of which had denied it was possible for Christ to be present in the eucharistic wine, there now arose a vocal group who believed it was possible for the devil to be present there instead. Ultimately, drunkards were no longer blamed for abuse and debauchery but, for the first time, they began to be viewed as victims who had been ruined by "demon rum." Men like Dr. Nott, in their attempt to twist the Scriptures to force people into total abstinence, succumbed to the heretical theory that material objects could be inherently evil, and attacked them as such.

In 1827, one Professor Reuben D. Muzzey sounded the bugle for the defeat of this unveiled devil. Alcohol, for him, became the personification of evil.

Let all virtuous men unite to expel the common enemy. He ought not to be allowed place in Christian society. He is a foreigner, a Mohammedan; he was born in the land of robbers, and he has established the genuineness of his origin by the millions he has deprived of property, of morals and of life. He has come to us in the robe of friendship, has assured us of his best regards, has proffered his aid and solace in sickness, pain and poverty. Such a friend, who could reject? He has been received into general favor, and admitted to Christian confidence and companionship; and what rewards has he taken for his kind offices? He has stolen away character, health, property, the rich blessing and endowments of society and domestic intercourse, the moral sense, life, and hope of heaven.

Gird up, then, to the combat. Always meet him as an enemy; never again admit him to your bosoms; give him no quarter; expel him from your houses; drive him from the land. Always treat him as a murderer; he has slain your brothers, he lurks for the life-blood of your children; he whets his saber for you.¹²

This idea of alcohol being inherently evil also reared its head in England through a temperance leader named Dr. Frederick Lees. Dr. Lees' conclusion that all alcoholic beverages were "inherently evil" caused him to turn his campaign against communion wine. He pointed out the inconsistency, as one put it, of banishing wine from one's home while regarding it suitable for the Lord's Table. This of course raised again the big question

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 427.

regarding the use of the word "wine" in the Holy Scriptures. Lees insisted that the word for wine at one place referred to "good" (i.e., non-intoxicating) wine, and in other places "bad" (i.e., intoxicating) wine. It didn't bother Dr. Lees to give two radically different interpretations to what was the very same word in the original languages of the Holy Scriptures.

But Lees didn't stop here. Not content with the remaining grape juice in the chalice, he now contended that water should be used in Communion services. He published a long "Prize Essay on the Nature, Elements and Rites of the Christian Eucharist," in which he

followed up his debunking of wine by some special pleading on behalf of water. "If," he suggested, "we recollect ... the servile condition of the Hebrews in Egypt and the excellent quality of Nile water ... it will seem most probable that WATER was the general drink at the original institution of the Passover."¹³

Miracle upon miracle! First we have Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana. Now, eighteen hundred years later, we have the fanatic Lees turning the wine back into water at the Eucharist in Great Britain.

What is even more stunning is the fact that while Dr. Lees became the joke of his generation and was rightly debunked as a dishonest philosopher with a phony doctorate who could "reconcile the most palpable contradictions and prove that light and darkness are both one," his theory later was to become a key apologetic for the modern abstinence position.

Dr. Lees' proposition was too much for one of the greatest American temperance apologists, ministers, and Bible scholars, Henry Ward Beecher, son of the famous Rev. Lyman Beecher. In his famous work on *The Life of Jesus Christ*, Henry comments on the wedding miracle at Cana:

That the wine created by our Lord answered to the fermented wine of the country would never have been doubted, if the exigencies of a modern and most beneficent reformation had not created a strong but unwise disposition to do away with the undoubted example of our Lord. But though the motive was good, and the effort most ingeniously and plausibly carried out, the result has failed to satisfy the best scholars; and it is the almost universal conviction of those competent to form a judgment, that our Lord did both make and use wines which answer to the fermented wines of the present day in Palestine.¹⁴

In this same book, the Rev. Beecher reinforces his displeasure with a Mr. William Thayer's "two wine theory" by inserting a powerful rebuttal from the editors of his church's news review:

We respect the zeal of Mr. Thayer, and do not question his sincerity. But we have gone over the arguments he had reproduced; we have considered his so-called evidence, which has so often done duty in its narrow range; we have pondered the discussions of Lees, Nott, Ritchie, and Duffield, before him; what is more, we have gone over the Greek and

¹³ Norman Longmate, *The Waterdrinkers* (London: Hamish Hamilton, Ltd., 1968), p. 186.

¹⁴ Henry Ward Beecher, *The Life of Jesus the Christ* (New York: J.B. Ford & Co., 1871), pp. 142, 143.

Hebrew Scriptures for ourselves; have sifted the testimony of travelers who knew, and those missionaries and have conferred with Jewish Rabbis on the subject; and if there is anything in Biblical literature on which we can speak confidently, we have no doubt that Dr. Laurie is right and that Rev. Mr. Thayer is wrong. [Mr. Thayer's book is an attempt to show that there are two kinds of wine spoken of in the Bible, one of which is intoxicating and the other not.]

In these views we are thoroughly supported. If we mistake not, the Bible scholarship of Andover, Princeton, Newton, Chicago, and New Haven, as well as Smith's *Bible Dictionary* and Kitto's *Biblical Cyclopaedia*, is with us. One of the most learned and devout scholars of the country recently said to us: "None but a third-rate scholar adopts the view that the Bible describes two kinds of wine." The National Temperance Society has done its best to create a different popular belief, if not to cast odium on those who do not accept its error. We regret it, for the temperance cause can be carried on by sound arguments and fair means, and all false methods must recoil at last!¹⁵

Beecher's argument is in line with over eighteen hundred years of clear Christian consensus. But Beecher did not prevail. The temperance movement was taken over by those who, although lacking the intellectual integrity of true scholars, had the emotional power to sway the hearts of the growing army of women who now rallied to the total-abstinence cause.

Enter the Ladies

Victorian women, who had long been ripe for a passionate cause, unleashed their full fury against alcohol and the men who consumed it. Alcohol was now the devil that had messed up their men. Soon it was the women who were sitting and waiting in temperance meetings ready to be the exorcists of this evil.

It was a temperance speaker named Dr. Dioclesian Lewis, with his lectures, "Our Girls" and "The Duty of Christian Women in the Cause of Temperance," who sparked the Women's Crusade, and set thousands of furious females marching against the saloons with prayers upon their lips and destruction in their hearts."¹⁶

The male leaders of the temperance movement had failed dismally to scotch or even control the evil, and women all over the country were restive; there were many demands for one sort of direct action. The ladies were primed and ready to shoot. Dr. Lewis pulled the trigger.¹⁷

An overwhelmingly enthusiastic response was gained in December at a lecture at a girl's college by Dr. Lewis. The next day, a meeting was set up in the Presbyterian Church in Hillshire, Ohio, to elect a woman to oversee the group of female volunteers. A Presbyterian

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Asbury, *The Great Illusion*, p. 68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

minister presided over the meeting until another man suggested that " 'the ladies will do nothing until the gentlemen of the audience leave the house.' And the men adjourned to leave this work with God and the women."¹⁸

Thus was the temperance movement handed over to the women. An attorney's wife, Mrs. Alice J. Thompson, felt the call of the Lord and was elected president of this band. Then "Mother Thompson," as she was thereafter affectionately called, rallied the ready crusaders:

"We will sing the good old hymn, 'Give to the Winds Thy Fears,' and as we all join in singing, let us form in line, two by two, the small women in front, leaving the tall ones to bring up the rear, and let us at once proceed to our sacred mission, trusting alone in the God of Jacob." Some singing, some praying, some weeping, and all visibly in the transports of religious exaltation, "this band of mysterious beings," as Mother Thompson called them, marched out of the church--and the most remarkable, and hysterical demonstration of feminine power in American history was under way.¹⁹

Drugstores, saloons, and anyone who sold any kind of alcoholic beverage by the drink or in bulk fell victim to the women's assault. Proprietors, some resisting, some fighting, eventually gave up through conversion or plain frustration. All over the country, hundreds of groups of women like this band of seventy from Ohio closed thousands of saloons and poured millions of gallons of "devil rum" down the streets and gutters of America.

Even churches were not spared from the women's attack. When the temperance movement began, wine was still being used in the Lord's Supper by churches everywhere. But now, as the temperance effort became a movement of total abstinence, the wine of the Lord's Supper once again became a hot issue. By 1876, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), in its eagerness to banish all alcoholic beverages from the land, adopted the old and erroneous "two wine theory" of Nott and Lees and contended that the word "wine" referred to unfermented grape juice. Ruth Bordin reports:

The report was adopted by the convention, and the battle against communion wine began. It was most successful. Over the next few years grape juice replaced wine in almost all Methodist, Baptist and Congregational churches and some Presbyterian churches.²⁰

Since women outnumbered men in church attendance, their influence would now be felt as they held their churches hostage to their cause by boycotting the Lord's Supper. Bordin continues, "Pressure was put on Protestant churches at every level, and WCTU members of these churches abstained from partaking in the rite of holy communion until their congregations fell into line."²¹

Originally the temperance movement began with an all-male leadership which promoted moderation in the use of wine and beer. But by the end of the century, the temperance

¹⁸ Bordin, *Women and Temperance*, p. 18.

¹⁹ Asbury, *The Great Illusion*, p. 73.

²⁰ Bordin, *Women and Temperance*, p. 64.

²¹ *Ibid.*

movement reached its peak with the sight of huge men slinking cowardly under the hatchet of an emotionally unbalanced and frenzied woman named Carry Nation.

Carry Nation was the daughter of a mentally ill mother who believed she was Queen Victoria, and the wife of a "Campbellite" Christian preacher whom she continually and publicly ostracized and humiliated for his weakness of speech, until he finally left her. Likening herself to the Apostle Paul, she bore the self-proclaimed messianic title of "Defender of the Home."

Mrs. Nation could whip her devoted followers into an incredible frenzy. She was the local general, and she called the ladies to holy war. "Take your consecrated hatchets, rocks and brick-bats and everything that comes handy, and you can clean this curse out! Don't wait for the ballots! Smash! Smash!"²²

Thousands of women in cities and towns throughout the country picked up the battle cry of this WCTU activist. Self-admittedly tormented by visions day and night, Carry Nation violently struggled, she believed, with Satan himself as she smashed up the saloons of America while the WCTU cheered her on.

What incredible irony! The Church began with the Son of Man cleaning out the temple with a whip, but now it had sunk to the humiliation of a pathetic, crazed woman cleaning out the saloons of the land with an axe and a bat.

Thousands of women converged upon one of the few remaining sanctuaries of male community in America and literally reduced it to splinters. And very often the men just stood by and watched! After Carry Nation and three female companions demolished his tavern, a Mr. James Burnes was asked by an astonished bystander:

"Why don't you knock the woman down?" "God forbid," said Mr. Burnes chivalrously, "that I should strike a woman." Within fifteen minutes the four women had wrecked the saloon with a thoroughness that would have done credit to a cyclone.²³

Why didn't the men resist? They really couldn't. The accepted Victorian gender images wouldn't permit it. A Victorian man did not dare question the rightness of a woman's cause because he had already accepted a place of moral inferiority. He couldn't really debate her claims about the harmful effects that men's drinking had on their children, because he no longer had charge of the kids. He couldn't prevent her from teaching upcoming generations the heresy that alcohol was inherently evil, because he had long ago abdicated his role as Christian educator in the classrooms and Sunday schools of the land. He was even powerless to physically restrain her from literally annihilating his male hangout, because to stand in the way of the Victorian crusader, no matter how crazed and violent she might be, was unthinkable.

With the onslaught of united female pressure for temperance and prohibition, men soon closed the numerous tavern doors--for a season.

²² Asbury, *Carry Nation*, p. 108.

²³ *Ibid.*, p 121.

The False Premises of the Abstinence Movement

Why didn't American tavern doors stay shut? Because they were closed for the wrong reasons. Every American male knew instinctively that something was wrong. The government declaration of the illegality of alcohol in the early twentieth century was based, in large part, on two faulty presuppositions of the abstinence movement: namely, that alcohol is inherently evil, and that moderate drinking always leads to abuse.

The first of these presuppositions was a theological one that constituted a radical departure from the historical consensus of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The illogical conclusion that wine is inherently evil is as old as the devil himself, as Irving Woodworth Raymond points out:

The Gnostics at the time of Christ believed that matter was inherently evil because it was the creation of an inferior and evil spirit who was hostile to God. Of all this evil creation, wine and women were considered the most evil. Abstinence from wine and marriage therefore was a logical outcome of this belief.²⁴

A group of gnostics called the Encratites, who flourished in the third century, were so well known that anyone who abstained from wine was called an "Encratite." Another smaller heretical group, the Hydroparatae, used only water instead of wine in the Eucharist.

The Church Fathers stood united against these sects and their attempts to confuse the Christian believers. Therefore, we see men like the first-century Church Father, Clement, whose writings were read in all the churches, preaching vehemently against drunkenness and the misuse of wine, but going on to say, "a joy of the soul and heart was wine created from the beginning when drunk in moderate sufficiency." Clement is acknowledged as a saint of the Church, East and West.

The nineteenth-century teetotalers who came to the conclusion that alcohol was "intrinsically evil" fell into the old gnostic heresy. Needing to justify themselves, they applied the now-popular ethos of private interpretation and came up with their own novel doctrine. But unbeknownst to them, the novel doctrine they invented to escape their dilemma was, in reality, a rerun of ancient gnosticism. The Church had always stood against such heretical teaching by insisting that what God has made cannot be innately evil.

A typical proponent of the Church's position is the greatest Christian preacher of all time, the famous Church Father, St. John Chrysostom. Born in Antioch in A.D. 346, Chrysostom was deeply learned in the Scriptures and burned with a zeal for righteousness. Chrysostom also preached with great fervor against drunkenness, even calling for total abstinence among the clergy.

²⁴ Irving Woodworth Raymond, *The Teaching of the Early Church on the Use of Wine and Strong Drink* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 93.

Admonishing people who had been misled by the gnostics, who wanted to abolish wine altogether because they believed that it in itself was the cause of drunkenness, Chrysostom taught that the evil of wine lies in its abuse and not in its nature. Wine, he insisted, is a work of God and therefore good in its nature, whereas drunkenness is a work of the devil and therefore evil. Chrysostom taught that the real issue was selfcontrol.

God has sanctioned its use under certain conditions and for certain approved ends, but man has exposed this gift of God to the ridicule of fools and has stained it with intemperance. Wine was given to make us cheerful, not to make us behave shamefully; to make us laugh, not a laughing-stock; to make us healthy, not sick; to mend the weakness of the body, not to undermine the soul.²⁵

While Chrysostom was adamant about alcohol abuse, he likewise had no tolerance for the heretical view that alcohol was inherently evil.

For instance, I hear many say, when the excesses happen, "Would there were no wine." O folly! O madness! When other men sin, dost thou find fault with God's gifts? And what great madness is this? What? did the wine, O man, produce this evil? Not the wine, but the intemperance of such as take an evil delight in it. Say then, "Would there were no drunkenness, no luxury;" but if thou say, "Would there were no wine," thou wilt say, going on by degrees, "Would there were no steel, because of the murderers; no night, because of the thieves; no light, because of the informers; no women, because of adulteries;" and in a word thou wilt destroy all.²⁶

As history repeats itself, so do heresies. So it was not surprising that in an attempt to bring temperance back to drunken husbands who had deserted their proper place in the home, the baby once again gets thrown out with the bath water. Or, I should say, the wine got thrown out with the drunkards.

Temperate Drinking and Drunkenness

Basing their first premise on a heretical misinterpretation of Scripture, Victorian temperance leaders also came up with a second false theory--namely, that moderate drinking always leads to alcohol abuse. Recall again the words of the total-abstinence apologist Dr. Nott: "Drunkenness is caused by drinking-moderate, temperate, continuous drinking."²⁷

Nothing demonstrates how ludicrous Dr. Nott's argument is more dramatically than a look at the drinking practices in the Jewish culture. Why the Jews? Because Jewish people drink far more frequently than Roman Catholics or Protestants, and yet alcohol abuse is rare in the Jewish culture.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²⁶ Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), Vol. 10, p. 356.

²⁷ *Cyclopedia of Temperance and Prohibition*, p. 459.

In a remarkable book called *Alcohol and the Jews*, Yale sociologist Charles Snyder made a thorough study of drinking and sobriety among twentieth-century Jews to try to unlock their secret. What is the first thing that Snyder notices in his extensive research? The frequency with which Jews drink.

The Orthodox Jew, from the eighth day of his life on, is surrounded by religious ceremonies that include the act of blessing and drinking wine. He is introduced to ceremonial drinking early in life, and the experience recurs frequently at weekly Sabbath rites, at holy days throughout the annual religious cycle, and in rites of passage.²⁸

Not only do Jews drink frequently, but Snyder discovered that total abstinence from alcoholic beverages was much rarer among Jews than among Roman Catholics or Protestants. "Jews have the smallest number of abstainers (13 per cent) compared to Catholics (21 per cent) and Protestants (41 per cent)."²⁹

According to the "moderate drinking always leads to abuse" theory, Jews should suffer from higher rates of alcohol abuse than Catholics or Protestants. But Snyder discovered just the opposite was true.

All the evidence from both European and American sources indicates that in the Jewish group pathologies are rare. Whether a comparison is made with groups in Western society in general or with other ethnic groups in the United States, the rates of drinking pathologies among Jews are consistently low?³⁰

These facts led Snyder to describe American Jews as "a group numbering many millions who drink a variety of alcoholic beverages extensively with few pathological consequences."³¹

Studies show that Jews are not only less inclined to alcohol abuse, but they are far less tolerant of abuse than are Roman Catholics or Protestants. As one Jewish college student put it, "To me a drinker [a drunk] is a coward. He's trying to find the easiest way out of his troubles. I really don't think there's any excuse for a man to be an habitual drunk no matter what the circumstances."³²

Instead of reinforcing the myth that moderate drinking always leads to abuse, drinking patterns and attitudes in the Jewish culture vividly demonstrate that moderate drinking in the context of family and faith is an integral part of an authentically balanced life.

It may not surprise you to hear that the highest rate of alcohol abuse is found in people whose parents abused alcohol. But what may well surprise you is that some research indicates that the next highest rate of alcohol abuse is to be found, not among children of

²⁸ Charles R. Snyder, *Alcohol and the Jews: A Cultural Study of Drinking and Sobriety* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958), p. 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

those who drink in moderation, but in the children of those who practice and preach total abstinence!

I suspect this is the case because in the minds of both abusers and teetotalers, the association between alcohol and drunkenness is so absolute that the possibility of drinking for some reason other than to get drunk doesn't exist. Neither of these groups sees moderation as a way of addressing the matter. To them, the purpose of consuming alcoholic beverages is always to get inebriated.

In thirty years of ministry, I've encountered countless people with drinking problems. My experience and that of other pastors I've known bears witness to the reality that homes where alcohol is moderately and responsibly consumed produce fewer problem drinkers than either homes where alcohol is abused or homes where alcohol is understood as intrinsically evil.

The Manly Virtue of Self-Control

The temperance movement had devastating and emasculating consequences on millions of American men. By the time of Prohibition, large segments of an entire society bought into the faulty belief that men were incapable of self-control and needed to be rescued from "demon rum" by the messianic hands of crusading Victorian women. Has this messianic meddling born good fruit?

Not on your life.

Our current national epidemic of alcoholism shows how big a failure the temperance movement was. And the problem will not be solved until American men stop whimpering and whining about their helplessness under the despotic reign of alcohol and once again, like their forefathers, behave like godly men and exercise the manly virtue of self-control.

That said, there certainly are people with a genetic predisposition towards abusing alcohol. And there are those whose will has been severely weakened by repeated abuse. These are people for whom complete abstinence truly is the only workable way to keep from abusing alcohol. But they are the exception, not the rule. To say that alcohol is "the devil's brew" because of their inability to manage it is as ridiculous as saying penicillin is inherently evil because certain individuals, like me, are allergic to it.

The "diseasing" of America, wherein all of our moral failings have been reclassified as diseases, has made virtues like self-control irrelevant. Any call to practice moderation through the virtue of self-control is viewed in many quarters as equivalent to a request to stop a speeding bullet or leap a tall building.

And yet, the Scriptures speak of self-control as not only attainable, but essential. Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22, 23). Its presence in our lives makes us useful for the Kingdom of God (see 2 Peter 1:5-8) and it is a trait that is a prerequisite for leadership in the Church (see Titus 1:7, 8). Not only that, the lack of self-control is a fault which is characteristic of those who, in the last days, lead people away from Christ (see 2 Timothy

3:1-7). And the lack of self-control that leads to willful, continued drunkenness ultimately results in some very dire consequences (see 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

Self-control is one of the virtues most conspicuously absent in the pleasure-crazed, self-absorbed, middle-aged "boys" of America. One of the marks of a true man, especially a man of God, is that he struggles [the historic Reformed/Covenant view of sanctification] to control his appetites and passions instead of letting them control him. But self-control is an acquired character trait. It must be taught and learned. Someone must teach us how and when to say, "No." That someone should be the fathers of America.

The best way to teach is by example. And historically, as the Jewish culture shows us, one of the ways that children learn self-control and moderation is to watch their father partake of the fruit of the vine without letting it control him.

Today, small but significant portions of Christendom run away from, rather than control, the good creation of God and thereby forfeit the opportunity to be an example to the youth of America. With the rapid increase in missing and passive fathers, who will prevent our sons and daughters from exerting even less self-control than we do? If we think we've got a lot of hopeless alcoholics running around loose now, we ain't seen nothin' yet. The youth of today, millions of whom are already chronic alcoholics, are in desperate need of models, of heroes, of genuinely righteous men who will teach them, by example, the life of self-control. And this will only happen with American men when drinking is once again connected with the image of earthly fathers who teach, by word and example, that the fruit of the vine is the "good gift of God," to be enjoyed and not abused.

I am *not* arguing that everyone should drink. A father may choose to model self-control by giving his family the example of his abstinence. I have no problem with that as long as it is done for the right reasons--as long as it is not based on the heresy that part of God's creation is inherently evil.

Whether we practice abstinence or moderation, we must never forget this:

All that exists is God's gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life communion with God. It is divine love made food, made life for man. God *blesses* everything He creates, and, in biblical language, this means that He makes all creation the sign and means of His presence and wisdom, love and revelation: "O taste and see that the Lord is good."³³

³³ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), p. 14.

