

THE DANGERS OF EXCESS

Introduction

Mr. Jackson was a man who loved two things: he loved to play with his ten-year old son, Randall, ... and he loved to drink.

One day after work, back in the fall of 1964, Mr. Jackson stopped off as usual at the corner bar before heading home to play with Randall—but this time he had one too many drinks. On his way home Mr. Jackson's car struck and killed a child riding on a bicycle. Mr. Jackson did not get to play with Randall that afternoon. He went directly into the house, and secluded himself in the attic until the police came to place him under arrest.

Having pleaded guilty to hit and run driving and driving under the influence of alcohol, he was sentenced to prison. The authorities did let Mr. Jackson attend the funeral of the child whom he struck down. Yes, the young ten-year old boy on the bicycle was Randall.

Our next topical study from the Book of Proverbs focuses our attention on the subject of the Dangers of Excess, especially excess in the area of drinking.

I. Avoid Indulging to Excess, Because of the Tragic Consequences (Proverbs 23:29-35; Proverbs 20:1; Proverbs 28:7)

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? ³⁰Those who linger over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. ³¹Do not gaze at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. ³²In the end it bites like a snake, and stings like a viper. ³³Your eyes will see strange sights, and your heart will utter perverse things. ³⁴Indeed, you will be like him who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like him who stretches out on top of the ship's rigging. ³⁵"They hit me," you will say, "but I was not hurt! They beat me, but I did not feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?" (Prov. 23:29-35)

In contrast to the fantasyland of T.V. advertising, Proverbs 23:29-35 describes the actual results of excessive drinking.

Verse 29 asks a series of questions. *"Who has woe?"* Who has troubles and problems—financial, personal, and legal; problems at home, at work, problems with the law? If you turn to drink to escape your problems, be advised that you will only compound those problems and add to them. The way to deal with your problems is to take them to Jesus, ... to take personal responsibility for them, ... to take biblically prescribed action to address them, ... but not to take up a bottle!

"Who has sorrow?" Who as regrets, anguish of heart, and guilt? *"Who has strife?"* Who has arguments and fights with their spouse; conflicts with the boss and/or fellow employees; and maybe even run-ins with the law? *"Who has complaints?"* Who hears complaints and hassles from their spouse or their boss? Who complains that nothing is working out right; life at work and/or at home is falling apart, it is coming unraveled, it is out of control? *"Who has needless bruises?"* When the drunken stupor wears off, your head is left pounding with a bad hang over, and you begin to feel the aches and bruises due to injuries suffered the night before: falling on your face in the gutter, getting into a fight at the bar, getting mugged in a back alley. *"Who has bloodshot eyes?"* As you look into the mirror, you are confronted by the effects of drink upon your appearance: your eyes are red and bloodshot. You can see for yourself that drink is beginning to claim your good looks, your youth, your life.

Verse 30 supplies the answer to these questions. *"Those who linger over the wine."* Here is a reference to excessive drinking, overindulgence, going beyond moderation and self-control to the point of intoxication. *"Those who go to taste mixed wine."* *"Mixed wine"* is stronger drink; as one becomes accustomed to drink, more is needed to have the desired affect; such a person is now heading in the direction of addiction.

Verses 33-35 describe the consequences of abusing drink, drinking to excess, and coming under the control of strong drink. *"Your eyes will see strange sights."* You lose control of your rational faculties, you begin to hallucinate: misinterpreting what you see before you, misinterpreting reality in a dream-like state of intoxication. *"Your heart will utter perverse things."* You will lose control of your moral restraints; the evil of the human heart will be unleashed and begin to express itself: *"out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slander"* (Matt. 15:19.)

Verse 34 goes on to say, *"You will be like him who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like him who stretches out on top of the ship's rigging."* That is to say, you will lose your common sense. You will cast all caution to the wind and do reckless, foolish things. You will put your life in jeopardy, being either oblivious to what you are doing or being deluded with a sense of invincibility. Consider the following newspaper article:

LITTLEVILLE, Ala.—A man lying alongside railroad tracks was struck by a train that severed his left leg, a repeat of an accident eight years earlier that cost him his right leg. The train's engineer spotted the man along the tracks with one leg draped over a rail, but could not stop in time ... the incident took place near the site where the man lost his other leg in 1986 ... The man had been drinking heavily both times he was hit ... (*The Sheboygan Press*, 5/19/94)

“They hit me,’ you will say, ‘but I was not hurt! They beat me, but I did not feel it!” You will temporarily become insensitive to pain; you may well come to view liquor as a means of escaping from pain and from problems. *“When will I wake up so I can find another drink?”* You may well become addicted, finding intoxication preferable to the state of sobriety with its responsibilities.

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, whoever is led astray by them is not wise. (Prov. 20:1)

“Wine is a mocker.” Strong drink causes a man to make a fool of himself; it will make a mockery of you if you let it. Furthermore, coming under the intoxicating influence of strong drink, one loses control of his moral restraint and consequently by his speech and behavior he becomes a mocker of God and of godliness. Under the influence of strong drink, *“your heart will utter perverse things”* (Prov. 23:33b). Under the influence of strong drink, Belshazzar did a very blasphemous thing:

Belshazzar the king gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ²While Belshazzar was drinking wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines, might drink from them. ³So they brought in the golden goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines, drank from them. ⁴They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone. (Dan. 5:1-4)

“Strong drink is a brawler.” Another consequence of coming under the influence of strong drink is the loss of self-control and the outburst of vicious and violent behavior.

“Whoever is led astray by them is not wise.” A wise man not only exercises self-control, he also avoids surrendering himself to those things that take an evil control over him and his faculties. Drinking to excess, coming under the influence and control of intoxicating drink is the course of the fool.

Whoever keeps the law is a wise son; but whoever is a companion with gluttons brings disgrace upon his father. (Prov. 28:7)

Another consequence of overindulging and going to excess is the shame and disgrace it brings to your family. This is the opposite of the commandment to Honor your father and your mother. We must appreciate the fact that our actions have repercussions that affect not only ourselves but also those loved ones with whom we are identified. The Word of God as it is presented in the Book of Proverbs warns us to Avoid Indulging to Excess, because of the Tragic Consequences of doing so.

II. Avoid Indulging to Excess, By Heeding Godly Counsel (Proverbs 23:31-32; Proverbs 23:20-21)

Do not gaze at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. ³²In the end it bites like a snake, and stings like a viper.
(Prov. 23:31-32)

Verse 31 warns us, *“Do not gaze at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly.”* Do not let the enticement of the wine (or strong drink) cause you to surrender yourself to its control; although it holds out the promise of enjoyment and escape, beware of the high price it exacts.

Verse 32 warns, *“In the end it bites like a snake, and stings like a viper.”* We must look beyond the immediate allurements and take into account the effect it will produce once we have yielded ourselves to its seduction—its effect is compared to the bite of a poisonous snake: it is lethal.

Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves with meat; ²¹for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags. (Prov. 23:20-21)

We are warned in these verses not to associate with such people who are given to excessive drink or any form of overindulgence as a lifestyle. The reason: that lifestyle of excess, of immediate gratification of the bodily desires, of self-indulgence and lack of self-discipline, leads to ruin. It will lead to financial ruin: *“drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags”* (Prov. 23:21.) It will lead to moral ruin: *“Do not be misled, ‘Bad companions corrupt good morals’”* (1 Cor. 15:33.)

May we be wise to observe the counsel of the apostle Paul given in 2 Timothy 2:22; *“Flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”* (2 Tim. 2:22.)

And do not become drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit—¹⁹speaking to each other with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and praising the Lord in your heart, ²⁰always giving thanks to our God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ for all things, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph. 5:18-21)

In this New Testament passage there is a comparison made between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Note that in Acts 2:4,12-13 those who were filled with the Holy Spirit were mistakenly thought by some to be filled with wine:

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them ... ¹²Amazed and perplexed, the crowd

asked one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³Some, however, mockingly said, "They are filled with new wine!" (Acts 2:4, 12-13)

In both cases one noticeably becomes a different person: you either come under the influence and control of strong drink or you come under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit.

In this passage of Scripture there is also a striking contrast between these two states. When one comes under the influence and control of strong drink, the perverseness of the heart is released and a demonic influence is present and exerting itself. Note again the warning of Proverbs 23:33b, *"your heart will utter perverse things."* When one comes under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit, a divine influence is present and exerting itself. Note, for example, Acts 4:31, *"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."*

The commandment is this: *"Do not become drunk with wine, ... Instead, be filled with the Spirit."* How are we, as Christians, to heed this command? First, we must realize that, as a Christian, the Holy Spirit is present and residing in our hearts: *"Now because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, and he is crying out to God, 'Abba, Father'"* (Gal. 4:6.) Second, we must release the control of our life to Him, as opposed to suppressing His presence. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit by harboring bitterness,

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger and clamor and slander, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other just as God by Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:30-32)

Do not provoke the Holy Spirit by giving someone or something other than Christ first place in your life,

You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? (Jam. 4:4-5)

Do not quench the Holy Spirit through practical unbelief, *"Do not quench the Spirit"* (1 Thess. 5:19.)

Third, we must rely upon the Holy Spirit when we are confronted by temptation or trial:

You belong to God, my little children, and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1 Jn. 4:4)

... if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you shall live. (Rom. 8:13b)

By the grace of God, let us Avoid Indulging to Excess, by Taking Heed to Godly Counsel. Do not allow yourself to come under the influence and control of strong drink, or any other sinful life-dominating power. On the contrary, yield yourself to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to fill your life with His presence and have control over you.

The example of Mr. Jackson is very painful to remember—but it would be far more painful to forget, only to repeat it in your own life.