



GOOD WINE, GLAD HEARTS

Part 21 of Proverbs

Pastor Mark Driscoll | March 24, 2002

Tonight, it's good to be with you. My mom and dad are here. I grew up right up the street, actually, right around the corner, and went to Highline High School, and then shortly after that, I learned how to read.

(Laughter)

Just kidding. And – I've had a long day. I preached three times this morning. I know a lot of you. It's good to see you. Some of you, I don't know. If you don't like me, that's okay. The real pastor will be back next week.

(Laughter)

Tonight, I get to talk about alcohol and then, after the service, you can apply what I preach. First, we'll start with a church history alcohol quiz because I know all that's why you came. St. Gall, great missionary to the Celts. Was he better known for, (a) his preaching or (b) his brewing?

Response: Brewing.

(B), his brewing. If you're gonna do any significant outreach to Irish people, you have to come with a pint of something, other than just good will.

Shortly after the rain of Charlemagne in Europe, one group became the exclusive brewer for all the beers throughout Europe. Was it (a) the atheists or (b) the church? The church, by God's grace.

When a young Christian woman in Europe was to be married – this is gonna go on for hours, so if you don't like this, I'm sorry. It's gonna get worse.

(Laughter)

When a young Christian woman was to be married in Europe, they would get together and they would form a special ale for her wedding day. They called it the bridal ale. That's where we get our word bridal is actually from the bridal ale. Now, was it the men in the church or the men in the pub who would brew this special bridal ale?

Response: The church.

Trick question. Those are the same guys, okay?

(Laughter)

Same guys. But, they would. The guys who ran the pub also ran the church and they would, when a woman – how many women are newly married or gonna get married? Young couples? See, Biblically – well, not Biblically, but, historically, the men in this church should have brewed you something. That would be more in line.

How about this? John Calvin, one of the greatest pastors, I think, in the history of the church, one of the greatest Bible commentators, he had in his pastoral compensation package, (a) a guarantee that he would get 250 new books each year or (b) that he would get 250 gallons of wine? (B), 250 gallons of wine as part of his pastoral compensation package. Today, we give you, you know, mileage on your car and maybe money to take people out to lunch. He got 250 gallons of wine as part of his compensation package for his duties as a good pastor. Obviously, he didn't drink that all himself. Otherwise, he would be having like breakfast wines. He had friends who helped him, and he threw large parties, and had people over all the time.

Martin Luther, question for you, he had a great wife named Katherine. Did he love her dearly because she memorized every Book of the Bible or because she was a classically certified, trained brewer?

Response: The answer's b.

(B), classically certified trained brewer. That, to me, is a Proverbs 31 Godly woman.

(Laughter)

She loves the Lord and she can brew well. Luther wrote love letters to his wife, Katherine, when they were separated, and he would say, "Dearest

Katherine, miss you greatly. There's nothing good to drink here. Can't wait to get home." Gentlemen, is that true? Is that a beautiful wife who's nice and sweet and loves the Lord and brews?

Response: (Inaudible comment).

Yes, that is a beautiful woman.

The last one is this. When the Puritans landed in our country, did they erect the first permanent building as (a) a church or (b) a brewery? (B), a brewery. The Puritans, when they landed here, first thing, they have to build a permanent building. They say, "Well, we gotta get a church up. We gotta get a brewery up. Which one first? We better get to the brewery because it's important that we get that up first." The Puritans get a knock as being sort of very restrictive and they definitely were not.

I love what Martin Luther says about this. He says, "Do you suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the object which is abused? Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall then we prohibit and abolish women?" The answer is no. He goes so far as to say, "You know, some people worship the stars. Should we pluck them out of the sky?" Well, no.

The point tonight is simply gonna be this. We're gonna talk about alcohol. My goal is to be Biblical. I wanna give you some historical work and we'll get into the Scriptures. It's interesting, too, how we get from this historic city of Christianity that was very free with alcohol and not drunkenness, but alcohol to our present day. And I'm gonna make a case that alcohol prohibition came out of feminism. Okay, some of you are saying, "What, is this case that women took our beer?" Yeah, that's my case.

(Laughter)

That's definitely my case. What happened was, around the turn of the century, there was a great increase in a couple of things. Liberal Christianity and feminism, as well as just more of a legalistic social structure, in general. Those things coalesced into what was known as the prohibition of the temperance movement. Liberal Christianity and feminism came together to outlaw alcohol. Where do you think grape juice came from? When do you think grape juice was officially created for American consumption? 1869, by Sir Dr. Thomas Welch. Welch's grape juice was created by a pastor who didn't wanna serve alcohol at communion anymore, so he took away the pasteurization process, created grape juice, okay? What denomination do you think he was?

Response: (Inaudible comment).

Methodist. Anyone raised Methodist? Okay, the reason why in your tradition they didn't allow alcohol is 'cause in 1869, a combination of liberalism and feminism, and a guy named Welch, who now you can go buy Welch's grape juice at the grocery store down the street, he created juice to get rid of wine for God's people. And one of the reasons that the feminist movement fought so hard to get rid of the pubs is 'cause the pubs were not like drunken frat parties in our day. What they were, they were social hubs. If you know anything about Europe or about Ireland, the pub is sort of the town hall. It's where everyone gets together. It's the social gathering place. In that place, people would come together, not to get drunk – it was actually very inappropriate get drunk – to have dinner. To conduct business. To shoot darts. To visit. To be together. It was a collecting place. One of the hardest parts in this city is when you move in; you don't know where to go to meet people. There is no central collecting, gathering hub. If some of you have moved in, you know how hard it is. Where do you go? I guess you can go to a church. A pub, it's all drunkenness and sin, so you don't necessarily connect there. But, there's not a social place to gather. The pub accommodated that function in early societies of Europe and early on in the United States of America.

But, those pubs were largely men. Some of those were largely male organizations. And so, there was a fight to get rid of alcohol and to shut the pubs down, and it was effective. Prohibition came into existence. Alcohol was effectively outlawed in our nation until it was repealed by an amendment some years later.

Jumping forward, what happened then was during this time, all the breweries went out of business. If you can't sell your product, you can't make any money. So, the only brewers that survived the prohibition and temperance movements was the breweries who transitioned into making other things like root beer and near beer, okay? If you ever tried near beer, you know that whoever dreamt that up has no idea of proximity because it is nowhere near beer. But, they survived. So, what happened then is all the smaller brewers go out of business and what ends up happening is the larger brewers survive, alcohol comes back into legality after the amendments, and the only things that are left are large, enormous breweries that brew sort of watered down lagers and really bad beers. You wonder how we got Miller Lite, a low calorie, distasteful beer. That's my case. My case is not that drinking beer is a sin. My case is that drinking light beer is a sin.

(Laughter)

That's gonna be my argument tonight, okay? And what this is gonna do, this is gonna trip up, a lot of you legalists are gonna trip over this. It's gonna be beautiful and then, Mike will come back and be your pastor and I'll go home.

A couple of things, if you were raised in the legalistic church are this. One, some say, "Oh, when the Bible says wine, it doesn't mean wine." What does it mean, pony?

(Laughter)

I mean, when it says wine, it means wine. Okay, when it says God, it means God. When it says hell, it means hell. It just – the Bible speaks of wine

frequently, and every time it does, it means wine. Some will say, "Oh, well, it speaks of new wine and new wine is wine that's not fermented, doesn't have alcohol." But, the Bible says that, "Don't get drunk on new wine." So, obviously, new wine still has alcohol. Some – how many of you were told that the Christians only had mixed wine? Wine that was mixed with water to dilute it, okay? They lied to you.

(Laughter)

Mixed wine does not refer to wine that is diluted with water. Only once in your Bible, Isaiah 1:22 does it speak of wine that's mixed with water and there, it's condemned because what it is is certain people are trying to sell wine and they're diluting it with water. They're ripping off their customers. Merchants are ripping people off, so it's unacceptable. And when it speaks of mixed wine in the Bible, in Psalms and in Song of Solomon Chapter 8, it speaks of mixed wine as being wine that is mixed with spices to give it additional flavor. Sometimes, it refers to wines that are mixed together to create a particular taste for the palette and, as well, occasionally mixed wine is wine that is mixed with fruit to create such things as a dessert wine.

Okay, and so, the other thing, too, is the Bible does speak of grape juice. In Number 6:3, it speaks of grape juice. So, if God was speaking about grape juice, it would seem that he would say grape juice, right? If he has a word for wine and he has a word for grape juice, and he meant grape juice, it seems like he should have used it, rather than speaking wine. My point is simply this. When the Bible says wine, it means wine. And when it says grape juice, it means grape juice. Now, here's what we'll get into. First of all, the point that all Christians agree on, that drunkenness is a sin, okay? We all agree on that. To get drunk is a sin. The Bible's clear on this. Paul says in Ephesians 5, "Don't get drunk." I don't know how much more emphatic and clear you can get than that. "Don't get drunk." What does drunk mean? Drunk means drunk. Wine means wine. "Don't get drunk."

I've got an enormous list of verses there under your first point. Here is things, as well, that pertain to drunkenness. The matter is so serious that no priest was to perform alcohol while performing their duties. You were not allowed as a priest to drink and go ahead and offer sacrifices and do the work in the temple. A priest, though, was, however, allowed to consume alcohol when they were not conducting their priestly functions. The offerings of grain and animal sacrifice and wine are given throughout Exodus. Numbers is acts of worship given to God, and the priest were allowed to take portions of the food and the drink, and to consume it, and to have it as part of their income. And so, consumption of alcohol for a priest in the Old Testament was not a sin, but it was a sin while they were working.

In the same way, guys who preach shouldn't have a few before they get in the pulpit. It's not a good idea. You wouldn't be happy if you went in for marital counseling and your pastor couldn't pass the breathalyzer. It's just not a good idea. In addition, according to Proverbs 31, "It is not for kings to drink beer while they are on the job, lest they pervert justice." So, also, as well, you wouldn't wanna go into a judge and have him, you know, throw you in jail because he was too drunk to read the docket. You are not, according to the Bible, to drink on the job. That includes priests, that includes judges. You're not supposed to drink on the job. You're not supposed to drink before you go to work. You shouldn't show up hung over. It will impair your job performance.

As well, we're told in the New Testament that "An elder or a pastor cannot be a drunkard." Doesn't mean they can't drink, but they can't get drunk. Otherwise, they've disqualified themselves from having the discipline of self control and, therefore, they should not be a pastor. And it tells us in Galatians 5:21 and in 1 Corinthians 6:10, that "No drunkard will inherit the Kingdom of God." And so, it's a serious sin that it can keep you from salvation, if you do not repent of that, come to faith in Christ, and change, by God's grace.

Sins associated with drunkenness include incest. Remember that in Genesis 19 where the two girls think the end of the world is coming, so they get their father drunk and they take him to bed in an effort to get pregnant? The first episode of Jerry Springer back in Genesis.

Drunk people also commit violence, adultery, mockery, and brawling. You ever met a really loud drunk who's always looking for a fight? Yeah, those guys are great.

Poverty, you can just drink too much and never make it to work. Stay up late at night and get up early in the morning to drink.

Some people drink so much they hallucinate. They start seeing things. I know none of you, but I'm just saying some people have. You're all good Christians.

Legendary antics. Any of you play drinking games? Don't raise your hands, but, you know, guys create – guys will compete over anything, they get drunk. "I threw up farther than you." "No, I threw up farther than you." Just dumb drinking games. Guys will invent the stupidest drinking games and then brag about it, as if they'd accomplished something. When I was in college, there was a fraternity where all the guys would sit up on the roof and they would do beer bongs and then they would jump off the roof into the swimming pool. And then, they'd brag about it. Woohoo. Yeah, put that on your resume. That's amazing. That'll definitely get you a good job. "I can drink like a fish and jump off a roof." Legendary antics.

And there are certain people who just do extreme things when they get drunk and they just love it 'cause everybody talks about them. And they think that because they're talked about, they're popular. They're not popular; they're very sad.

Also, some people drink so much, the Bible tells us, that they end up vomiting. They end up staggering. They get into madness.

Sometimes, some people are really loud when they're drunk. I don't know why that is. It's like the more you drink, the less you're hearing is actually functioning. You been in a room with a bunch of people that have had too much to drink, you notice it's loud? It's very loud. Really loud. It's like an Italian family reunion loud. It's really loud with people who drink too much. You guys are a hard crowd.

(Laughter)

As well, some people drink a lot and they laugh a lot. They're just the silly, dumb drunk.

(Laughter)

Right? Some of you laugh because that's why you go to the evening service. That's what you did last night.

Some people then sleep a lot. They just drink and sleep. Some people call that college.

(Laughter)

Some people, as well, the Bible says, "They try to get other people drunk so they could see them naked", right guys?

(Laughter)

Right? You tell me you haven't done this. Some of you say, "I'm not very attractive. I'm not very smart. I don't have a lot going for me. But, if I put a few drinks in her, my odds go up", right? Is that still a trick? It's not a big secret, but it's something that's in the Bible, all the way back in Isaiah over two and half thousand years ago, you know? Sometimes, the old methods work, so they stick around for a long time.

Some guys are just lazy. They drink a lot, watch TV, just do nothing.

Some people drink to escape their problems. They have trials, strife, difficulty, trouble, so they just drink to forget, right? We call that country western music.

Depression. Some people drink because they're depressed all the – oh, come on.

(Laughter)

So serious.

Some people drink to escape their problems. They don't like the difficulty and trial of life. Some people, it causes depression. And so, they're depressed and they drink, and what happens? Does it fix it? If you're depressed and you drink, does it get better? No. You end up getting really depressed. It pushes you into a deep, dark hole.

And then, some people drink and stay up all night. My point is simply this. You can look up all the verses. I can't read every one of 'em to 'ya. Drunkenness is a sin and when you are committed to drunkenness, you end up doing all kinds of other stupid things and your life gets into a real mess very quickly, okay?

What happens on this issue of alcohol is, for many of you, if not all of you, when we come to the issue of alcohol, we read into it whatever our past experiences have been. If you've drunk a lot, you may not be able to distinguish between drinking Biblically and just drunkenness. And so, for you, drinking equals drunk and you say, "I just can't have anything to do with that."

I'll tell you my background so you know where I'm coming from. My mom and dad are here tonight. I'll honor my dad. On my dad's side, there's some alcohol abuse, but it stopped with my dad. Okay, it stopped with my dad. My dad put his foot down and said, "My sons, our family, we're gonna do things a little differently." So, I grew up in a home where alcohol was not abused. It wasn't abused. My dad didn't abuse alcohol. It was, in our home, it was used appropriately. I would say it was used Biblically. There was no problem with alcohol in our home. So, I've never drank. I had a sip of beer, I didn't like the taste, when I was in high school. Occasionally, I'd have a sip of a cooler tested at my mom's house and – my mom and dad – and I just didn't really like it. So, I never drank. I made it all the way through high school without ever partying or drinking, okay?

I went to college and didn't drink at Washington State University.

(Laughter)

Response: (Inaudible comment).

Yeah, I mean, if – I mean, walking on water is nothing compared to that.

(Laughter)

That is a miracle of Biblical proportions. I was in a fraternity for two weeks before I got kicked out for beating up a guy who deserved it, and I never drank when I was there, and I've never beat anyone who didn't have it coming.

(Laughter)

And I had to leave the fraternity and one of the issues was these guys all would drink and I didn't like to drink. And they'd get belligerent and I wouldn't drink with 'em. So, it didn't go well. 'Cause if you don't drink, hanging out with a bunch of drunks is less than stellar company, right?

So, I ended up moving out and, even on my 21st birthday, I didn't have a drop of alcohol. Didn't. When do you think I had my first beer? Sat down and drank my first beer? Last year. Okay, last year. See? I told the morning services, "You drove me to it."

(Laughter)

So, for me, when I think of alcohol, I'm not thinking of alcohol abuse. I've never been drunk. I've never abused alcohol. Never. I didn't drink my first beer until last year, at 30 years of age, as a pastor of a church, husband, and father of a few kids. So, where I'm coming at is that I have not seen it abused in my family. I have not abused it. So, I may have a different perspective than some of you.

We'll get into the Bible. Here's what the Bible says. There are three perspectives on alcohol and Christianity. One is a prohibitionist, the other is an abstentionist, and the third is a moderationist. We'll shoot the first two. We'll argue for the third. If you're in one of those categories, sorry, you're gonna get shot.

(Laughter)

Prohibitionist wrongly teach that all alcohol is a sin and all drinking is evil, wicked and wrong, okay? They go so far. The most extreme statement I saw was that – said that, “Had Jesus ever consumed alcohol, he would have ceased being God.”

(Laughter)

Wow, right? But, that is a stupid position that you can't argue for Biblically. I'll give you some verses. Psalm 104:14-15, down at the bottom of your notes there. “God makes the grass grow for the cattle, plants for man to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth, and wine that gladdens the heart of man.” Who makes wine? Who created wine? God. And why did he make it? To gladden the heart of man. Does it still work that way? It does. It does.

(Laughter)

Man, you guys are a tough crowd. John Chapter 2. Does Mike tell many jokes or he is pretty straight?

(Laughter)

Does he try and tell jokes, but they're not very funny?

(Laughter)

Response: He tells 'em on accident, sometimes.

He tells 'em on accident. He doesn't know it? He's done that a few times.

(Laughter)

Okay, just checking. John Chapter 2, Jesus' first wedding is what?

Response: (Inaudible comment).

Making wine. Where? At a wedding at Cana of Galilee. The bride and groom throw the enormous wedding feast. They run out of alcohol. Major social faux pas. What happens then is that Jesus' mother, Mary, comes to him, says, “Son, you gotta do something. Help these kids out.” Jesus turns over the ceremonial wash basins and he has them filled with fresh water and he turns them into wine. It'd be the equivalent of walking into a Nazarene or a Methodist or a Baptist church and emptying out the baptismal so that you can brew.

(Laughter)

He makes between 100 and 180 gallons of wine, okay, which is – that's a – it's a good amount. One of the commentators that I read said, “Well, Jesus made wine, but he – it's not a sin to make wine. It's a sin to consume wine.” Look –

(Laughter)

“I don't know if you took a blow to the head or you went to public school or what happened.”

(Laughter)

“But, if you can't connect the dots, that a few hundred thirsty people that have been drinking all week run out and come to you, and you make 100 gallons, if you can't connect the dot that some of that alcohol will end up in some of those people, you're living in a surreal parallel universe that does not connect with reality.”

Did Jesus Christ drink? This should be the final bullet in the head of this position. Jesus drank, right? Matthew 11:19, Jesus says, give himself a title, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, ‘Here is a glutton, a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But, wisdom is proved right by her actions.” They look at Jesus and say, “This can't be God. People like him.” All the religious guys are saying, “No one likes us. What's wrong with Jesus?” “Nothing, you're just unpleasant. People don't like you, but they do like Jesus.” “He drinks. Hmm, not good. He eats a lot. We think he's a glutton. And all his friends are tax collectors and prostitutes, right? We see – he says he's God, but every time there's a party, he gets invited over.

“God wouldn’t do that. God’s very serious, very constipated. He has furrowed eyebrows and he’s very rigid, you know? And this God looks a little too happy. He looks like he’s having a good time. He must be a wicked man, okay?” That’s exactly what they say about Jesus. Does Jesus consume alcohol? Sure he does. Did Jesus ever get drunk? No, he didn’t. It says, “He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin” in Hebrews 4:15, which means maybe there was a day where he was tempted to, but he never did. So, can we say that the prohibitionist position is foolish and does not align with Scripture? Sure. If God makes wine, Jesus drinks it, and it’s given for the gladness of our hearts, then someone who says that it’s evil, vile, wicked and wrong, has got a real problem because what they’re saying is, “God sinned by making alcohol and Jesus sinned by touching it and putting it to his lips.” It’s a foolish position.

I had an argument with a buddy of mine a few years ago. Weird guy. He was a Christian. You always know they’re really weird when they’re Christians. And we were arguing about something and we were arguing about alcohol. He says, “Oh, you’re just arguing that alcohol’s okay ‘cause you wanna drink.” This was a few years ago. I said, “Drink? I don’t drink. I never have. I just don’t like you butchering the Bible like that. You’re saying, ‘Be Biblical. Be Biblical. Be Biblical. That’s not wine, that’s grape juice.’ Like what kind of insanity is that?” And I said, “Hey, look, did Jesus drink?” He said, “Yeah, but maybe he shouldn’t have.”

(Laughter)

“Really? Well, like, who you gonna appeal to?”

(Laughter)

“Who are you gonna send to spank him?”

(Laughter)

“Really?” I said, “Well, that’s funny. You’re holier than Jesus. That’s a problem. It’s a problem to be holier than Jesus. That’s a big problem.” I said, “If you can’t drink, that’s fine. We’ll get into some reasons why later tonight, but, boy, oh, boy, don’t start telling me that Jesus sinned because he’s not as holy as you are.”

Second position is the abstentionist position that says, “Alcohol consumption is not a sin, but because so many people abuse it, we should never drink alcohol.” That sounds pretty good. It’s a little better. Little better than the prohibitionist. We’ll shoot that one too. Hosea 2:8, God speaks of Israel here. Says, “She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold, which they used for Baal”, which is a false god that they worshiped. God gave them food, drink, wealth, and they used it for sin. Did God abstain in giving them things that he knew that they would abuse? He didn’t. Has God ever given you anything that you’ve abused? Given you a tongue and you said things you shouldn’t have said? Given you hands and you touched things you shouldn’t have touched? Given you a mind and you’ve thought things you shouldn’t have thought? Given you a mouth and you’ve eaten things that you shouldn’t have eaten, you’ve drunk things that you shouldn’t have drunk? He’s given you money and you spent it on things you shouldn’t have spent it on?

The abstentionist says, “Well, we should just get rid of things that cause us to stumble.” My question is this. Is there anything on planet earth that someone has not used to sin against God with? Everything has been used to sin against God. Martin Luther said, “You know, there’s stars in the sky and certain astrologers worship them. If it’s causing them to stumble, then we gotta find a way to take them down.” This position sounds good, but what it ends up doing is abstaining everything. You ever been in a church that said, “Well, we’ll abstain from this because people are stumbling. Oh, look, they’re still stumbling. We’ll abstain from this too.”? And next thing you know, right, you’re in a suit and tie. Your wife’s got a doily on her head.

(Laughter)

You’ve set the drum kit on fire. You’re reading the King James Bible. And you’re just praying that Jesus comes back ‘cause you’re so sick of being in church.

(Laughter)

You just keep making rules. Rules that aren’t in the Bible. I asked a pastor this recently. He said, “Well, every time there’s a debatable issue, I take the conservative side.” Why? To be safe.

Now, how far does this go? You keep making rules about the rules, about the rules until you do what? ‘Til you crucify Jesus. ‘Cause when Jesus comes, does he break any of the rules in the Bible? No. Does he break the stupid rules of religious teachers? At least you have to stop laughing. I can’t control myself.

(Laughter)

He does. He breaks all the – I have one person who’s actually helping me here.

(Laughter)

I’ve had a very long day. What happens is they make rules about the rules, about the rules. Jesus comes and he obeys all of the Scripture, but he breaks their rules and they say, “Oh, my goodness. He’s not as holy as we are. Someone should kill him.” That’s a problem. That’s a problem. I had this argument with a pastor, kind of friend, recently. He said, “Well, here’s my arg – he says, “You shouldn’t drink and you shouldn’t allow anyone in your

church to drink." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, people will stumble." I said, "Well, you know what also causes people to stumble?" He said, "What?" I said, "Food." I said, "We have a lot of eating disorders and all kinds of problems related to food." He said, "Well, I think you should outlaw alcohol." I said, "Fine. I'll outlaw alcohol when you outlaw food." He says, "Well, I can't outlaw food. We'll die." I said, "Promise?"

(Laughter)

"Promise?" You can – I said, "What – if you're telling me you don't wanna cause your brother to stumble, then just don't be so selfish, and just stop eating and die." He says, "Well, that's dumb." I said, "That's what I'm saying."

(Laughter)

"That's exactly my point."

(Laughter)

"That's dumb. That's a dumb case." "Oh, some people speed, so I don't drive anymore." "Some people are in debt, so I don't spend money." "Some people swear, so I don't talk."

(Laughter)

Right?

(Laughter)

"Some people are gluttons, so I don't eat." "Some people think that the water in the house is a god, so I don't bathe." It's just – it gets dumb. It gets really dumb.

Some other things. Matthew 11:19 again, Jesus drank. If Jesus – did Jesus drink in a day where people were abusing alcohol? Of course. They had a word. They said drunkard. They'd say, "Oh, there's a bunch of drunks and Jesus is one of those drunks." Obviously, people are getting drunk. Did Jesus abstain in a society where people are overindulging? He did not. I asked a guy recently, I said, "Well, are you holier than Jesus? Jesus didn't abstain in a society where people were abusing. You feel that you're holier than Jesus because you abstain." And I'm gonna push you on this. I'll show you why at the end.

I Timothy 4. I'll give you another one. "The Spirit clearly says that in a later time, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." We'll look at demonic doctrine. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars. I'll tell you this. A lot of pastors who argue, you know, "Don't enjoy marital sex. Don't eat food. Don't enjoy a glass of wine that makes the heart merry in God's presence", a lot of those guys are hypocritical liars. Two of the biggest pastors that were preaching abstinence a few years ago, both were fired because they were committing adultery on their wife, right?

I was dealing with a guy. He's the head of a large church, not too long ago, and their church forbids the consumption of alcohol among all their pastors and leaders. And I looked the guy in the eye, I said – he said, "Well, you shouldn't drink. Your guys shouldn't drink", and dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. I said, "Look, honestly, don't lie to me. Tell me the truth. You're a pastor. You run this large church. Do you drink? You forbid all your guys to drink. Do you drink?" Looked me in the eye and he said, "Yeah."

(Laughter)

"Well, when did lying become a better sin than drinking? At least lying made the Ten Commandments."

(Laughter)

"So, you're a holy man because you drink and lie about it?" I asked him, I said, "Now, tell me. Where do you drink, and when do you drink, and how do you drink?" He said, "Well, I gotta bunch of buddies that aren't Christians. I've been witnessing to 'em. They have a big poker game. They all get together and they drink beer and they play poker, so I go there and I hang out with the guys." He said, "It's the funnest time of the week. It's the only time I get to unwind."

(Laughter)

I said, "So, what happens if one of those guys becomes a Christian? Can you bring them to your church?" He says, "No, 'cause they'll tell everybody that I drink with 'em and then I'll have to fire myself."

(Laughter)

"Dude, you're an idiot. What kind of bizarre world – what is that? You know, what kind of? – it's just total hypocrisy. That's what Paul's talking – if you're doing one thing and preaching another, then either change your life to conform with your instruction or change your instruction so that it agrees with your life. But, don't be double minded and hypocritical like that. It's foolish, right? I told this guy, I said, "Honestly, you're the pastor. If you find that one of your pastors is drinking and they get caught, will you fire them?" He said, "Yeah, I will have to fire 'em." I said, "You'll fire 'em and then go out that night and play poker with your buddies and drink beer?" He laughed. He said, "Yeah, I guess so. That's pretty stupid, huh?"

(Laughter)

“Yes, you’re a very stupid man.”

(Laughter)

Don’t go to his church.

(Laughter)

“Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. Their moral compass is broken. They forbid people to marry. Order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is” what?

Response: Good.

Good. Okay, this is a very – this is an important point. Who made everything? God, okay? God made everything what? Good. Alright? Now, does Satan create anything? He does not. He only manipulates, and contorts, and bends what God has made. God creates sex. It’s beautiful. It’s for a husband and wife. Satan manipulates that and he opens the Déjà Vu down the street, okay? God creates alcohol for feasting, and celebration, and worship, and Satan owns the tavern down the street next door to the Déjà Vu. Alright, you get my point? God makes things good. People who don’t love God and don’t obey his Word, bend them toward something evil. I’ll do Q and A at the end. You need to understand that God makes good. And if we say that it is evil, we are saying that God made evil. Do you see where that is dangerous? Because now it’s bigger than food, or drink, or sex, or whatever it might be. We’re saying that a good God made evil things. That reflects back saying, “There must be evil in God.” That’s a dangerous thing to do. God is good. God is perfect. God is holy. God is not evil and God does not create evil. He creates things beautiful, glorious and good. And Satan perverts them into something ugly, despicable and deadly.

And so, what Paul tells us is, here, “For everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving because it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer.” Paul says in Titus 1:15, “To him who is pure, all things are pure.” We tend to think, “Is this thing pure or not pure?” the issue is not, “Is the thing pure?” The issue is, “Is the person participating in the thing pure?” If you are married and love God, sex is pure. If you are married and love God, and sit down at a dinner with your spouse and have a glass of wine, it is pure, right? If you love God, and you walk uprightly before him, and you’re having a meal, and you have something to drink, you are not sinning. It is not about the object. It is about the person and whether or not they are pure.

That’s where the abstentionist mentality, to me, is very, very, very deadly because what it teaches is that if something is used wrongly, then the thing is bad and we should get rid of it, okay? Let me ask you this. Is this a perfect book? The Word of God? Perfect, right? It is pure. It is perfect. It all we need for faith and Godliness. Has anyone ever bent this and used it for something ugly, and wicked and awful? Okay, therefore, do we abstain from it? Do we say, “Well, people use this for evil. We should get rid of it. Lots of cults have gotten started. A few witches got burned. Some bad things have happened.” There are people who argue that; that, basically, say, “You know what? The Bible has been used wrongly. Therefore, we should get rid of the Bible.” No, we don’t get rid of the Bible; we use it rightly. We don’t get rid of food; we use it rightly. We don’t get rid of sex; we use it rightly. We don’t get rid of alcohol; we use it rightly. We’re not about clean and unclean things. We’re about redeemed and unredeemed people who participate in those things.

And so, Paul tells us, 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether you eat, or drink or whatever you do, do it to the glory of God.” The issue is if you are doing it to God’s glory, it can be acceptable in his sight. We can take the abstentionist position and we can just shoot it. We could say, “Well, to abstain is not necessarily good because it is telling the world that God made things bad and they’re evil and we shouldn’t touch them; that Jesus was sinning when he consumed because he should have known better and not partaken.” And it sets a dangerous precedent whereby we decide that every time something happens, we’re just going to chuck out things that get abused.

Martin Luther’s point, I think, is a good one. Many women have been – many men have, rather, abused women and we’re not going to get rid of women. Men have abused all sorts of things. And we don’t get rid of them. If God made them, we learn to use them rightly.

The third position is the moderationist position that says that alcohol consumption is not a sin, but that some people can drink and some people can’t. It depends upon conscience. And I will tell you this. That legalistic morality and rules and regulations are not going to be good for God’s people; that the Bible, and the Holy Spirit, and prayer and your conscience are more than enough to guide you through controversial matters of life and doctrine, okay?

My point is simply is this. With the moderationist position, it distinguishes between universal and particular sins, okay? Universal sins are sins that are true for everybody, everywhere, all the time no matter what. What are universal sins? Give me some examples.

Response: Murder.

~~It doesn't matter what you do, where you go, what you do, those are always wrong. That's God's law. That's the~~
Bible, okay? The Bible laws are perfect and good, binding for everybody, everywhere, no matter what. No exceptions. There’s not a guy somewhere who has a good case for adultery. There’s not a guy somewhere who has a good case for rape. There is no good case. It’s always wrong. 1 John 3:4 tells us that, “All sin is lawlessness. It’s the breaking of those universal commands of God that are binding upon all men, all times, all places, all circumstances. In addition, though, are there particular sins? Sins, that are not for everyone for all the time, but it depends? For some of you, it’s a sin; for some of you, it’s not, okay?”

Now, here's the problem. Liberal Christianity, holds everything in an open hand. It says, "Well, maybe adultery's a sin, sometimes; maybe it's not. Maybe murder, sometimes; maybe not. Maybe drunkenness; maybe not. Maybe whatever, whatever." They put everything in an open hand. "Maybe drinking; maybe not. Maybe whatever; maybe not."

Legalistic Christianity puts everything in a closed hand. "No, everything's a universal law. Everything's a universal sin." Liberals say, "No, everything's a particular sin. It depends on the person." So, what ends up happening is, not only does Jesus' death, burial and resurrection go in this hand, so does rock music, the King James Bible, alcohol consumption, vegetarian diets, breastfeeding. I mean, just make the list for whatever it could be.

In this hand, for the liberals, goes everything. "Well, maybe it's a sin to drink for some; maybe not for others. Maybe Jesus is God for some; maybe not for others. Maybe the Bible's true for some; maybe not for others." What I'm telling you is you must be two handed in your approach to your faith. You must know what goes here and is flexible and what goes here and is inflexible. Drinking goes here. If you put it here, you're going to get in trouble one way or the other. The point is very simply this. For some of you, it's a sin to drink. For some of you, it's not. Okay, that's what we're going to get into it.

Here's my case. The fourth point. Wine is spoken of as both good and bad in the same verses in the Bible. So, wine is not necessarily good or bad. It depends on who's drinking it, why, what circumstances. Apart from good feasting in the Bible, there's lots of big feasts where people eat, and drink, and celebrate God. Scripture's rightly used for communion. Jesus instituted it at the last supper. Medicinal purposes, Proverbs 31, for those who were dying to help alleviate their pain. 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul tells the young man, Timothy, "You got an upset stomach, have a bit to drink and calm you down." It was used in Old Testament worship. You would bring grain offering, meat offering and an ephah of wine, told throughout Exodus and the Book of Numbers. Proverbs 3:9-10 indicates this presence of God's blessing. Tells us to, "Honor the Lord with all your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops, then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim with new wine."

The presence of wine is often an indication of God's blessing upon someone. Ecclesiastes 9 and 7 says to, "Go eat your food with gladness and drink your wine with a joyful heart." It commands us to do that. Psalm, again, that I read to you, tell us that, "Wine comes from God and it gladdens the heart of men." And in Deuteronomy 14:26, this is a very important section, the context here is after God's people have worked hard, made money, paid their tithe, paid their bills, invested to bless their children's children, like Proverbs declares, they have taken care of the widow, the poor, the alien among them. They've done all the things with their money that God tells them to. If they look at their money and they realize, "Man, we still have money left over. The question is, 'What should we do with it?'" Deuteronomy 14, God speaks and says, "Use the silver to buy whatever you like; cattle, sheep, bass boats, a big television, Mariner season tickets, wine, Guinness or other fermented drink, or anything else that you wish", right? "An air compressor, a hobby car", right? "Cable TV, whatever you want." In the King James, it says, "Whatever your soul lusteth after." "Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord, your God, and rejoice." You say, "Well, what about all those poor people?" "We gave to them." "What about God?" "We tithe." "What about our bills?" "We paid 'em. We have leftover, so we're getting a bass boat."

(Laughter)

"Or we're throwing a party, or we're taking a vacation, right? Or we're gonna open a pub. We're gonna enjoy ourselves. We're gonna have a good time here and it's not a sin." God gives life to be enjoyed. The reason that I hate legalism, and I take it very personally, is let me ask you this. Has God made me free in Christ? Absolutely. That's the whole message of Galatians. "God has made you free, so stand firm. Don't give up your freedom in Christ." Jesus says, "I come to give you life. Life that is abundant. Life that is full." He means that.

Now, is it okay if I give up some of my freedom because I love you and I don't want you to stumble? Is that okay? You bet it is. Is it okay for you to come and steal my freedom by making legalistic rules that take away the freedom that God has given me? No. The legalist can't distinguish between those things. The legalist says, "What's it matter, you know? You're not doing it. Who cares why you're not doing it. That's the important thing, right?" No, there's a big difference. Is there not a difference between you coming to my house (Knocking), knocking on my door, saying, "Brother Mark, I can't afford my rent this month. Could you help me?" and I'd give it to you because I love you and it's grace. Is there a difference between that and when I'm gone, you break into my house and rip me off? The legalist says, "What's the difference? They took your money to pay the rent." The issue is there's an enormous difference. One, they allowed me to love them and give them grace; and the other, they stole.

When God makes you free in Christ, you should be gracious and give away some of your freedom because you love people, but if they steal it from you, that is completely different and unacceptable. And once people start making rules, they start taking away more and more, and more freedom. And Jesus says, "You'll know the truth. The truth will make you free." It cuts you loose. You get to live and enjoy your life.

Here's where we'll go. We'll go to Romans Chapter 14. If you've got a Bible go there. We'll close here. This is gonna be the conclusion of my argument. It'll take us a few minutes to tease this out. Romans 13, the context is obey the governing authority, so if you're under 21 in this country, are you allowed to drink? No. In this country, if your blood alcohol level is above .08, are you allowed to drive? No. Okay? We just obey the law. Some of these issues are very clear because we just obey the laws that he government has established. Romans 13 is clear on that.

Romans 14, then, comes down to disputable, debatable matters where there's conflict. Some people think we should do this. Some people think we should do this. They're fighting over it and it's a win/lose scenario. Who are we going to go with, this team or this team? Here are the teams. Romans 14:1, "Accept him whose faith is weak." In light of our discussion, people who do not drink, are they weak or strong? They're weak. People who cannot drink with a clear conscience or weak. What is that?

(Laughter)

Do you have a fairy back there, James?

Response: I'm gonna kill it.

Yeah, go kill the fairy.

(Laughter)

If it's a guy with bells on his shoes, bring him out. We wanna see him.

(Laughter)

Wow. See, first, I thought, "I know I haven't been drinking."

(Laughter)

"But, I'm hearing things." If you are not allowed to drink because your conscience doesn't permit it, you are weak. You're not weak enough to drink. You need to accept that. You're weak. You're weak. Is it a sin to be weak? No, it's not a sin to be weak, but a lot of people who don't drink think they're really strong. "Look how strong I am. I don't drink." Well, no, you're weak. It's not a sin, though, to be weak. Are some of you physically weak? Right? You just about die carrying your groceries.

(Laughter)

You're weak. Okay, I'm sorry about that, but it's not a sin. Okay, it's not a sin to be weak. Okay, in the same way it is not to be physically weak, it's not a sin to be spiritually weak. But, it's like when you're physically weak, you need to workout to grow in strength. When you're spiritually weak, you need to exercise your faith so that it grows and strengthens, okay?

So, here's the deal. "Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters", okay? In Christianity, what matters are disputable? Not in this hand, in this hand. What are the traditional things that Christians fight over that are disputable? Food. Any vegetarians here tonight? Come on, raise your hand. Some of you are vegetarians, okay? Now, is it okay to be a vegetarian? Okay, is it okay for a vegetarian to tell the rest of us Biblical meat eaters that we cannot eat our big, fat, Biblical steak?

(Laughter)

No. No. Not good. Not acceptable. My point has always been if eating meat and cattle – if eating meat is wrong, then why would God make cattle out of steaks?

(Laughter)

Right? That's my case. Cows are made out of meat.

(Laughter)

Some of you are vege – what other issues are debatable, disputable matters?

Response: Pokeman.

What's that?

Response: Pokeman.

Videogames.

(Laughter)

Response: Calvinism.

Calvinism.

(Laughter)

That's – no, that's Biblical.

(Laughter)

See, no – see –

Response: Smoking.

Response: Music.

Smoking. Boy, there's a good one. Is smoking in the Bible?

Response: No.

It's not. Okay? Do I like smoking? No, I don't. I'm an asthmatic, okay? If I smoke, I get asthma. If you wanna kill me, make me pet a cat while smoking a cigarette –

(Laughter)

– and I'll just keel over and die, okay? I'm an asthmatic. I hate cats 'cause they don't fetch, and I hate cigarettes 'cause they cost money, okay? So, I don't like cigarettes. I don't like smoking. I don't. But, can I make a law that says, "Smoking is a sin?" No. Most pastors who say that, they'll use arguments like, "Well, your body's the temple of the Holy Spirit", right? Most preachers who say that, how big is their temple?

(Laughter)

Yeah, they got a few additions on the temple. It's like, I've met pastors who can't even get things out of their pocket that are telling me not to smoke 'cause it ruins the temple. And I'm like, "At this point, the temple's just – I mean, whatever. It's gone."

(Laughter)

"It's beyond repair." Can I make a law that just 'cause I hate smoking, and I don't like smoking, can I make a law that says, "All smoking is sinful and no smokers come to my church"? I can't 'cause it's not in the Bible. Now, I would like to.

(Laughter)

But, I can't because I'm not God. Any other things that are disputable that Christians tend to fight about?

Response: Gambling.

Gambling. Well, I could argue with you there, but I could argue about anything.

(Laughter)

What else?

Response: Music.

Music. Secular music.

Response: Dancing.

Dancing.

Response: Tattoos.

Tattoos.

Response: Piercings.

Piercings. You guys have been there, right? The music one, I love. The youth pastors always tell me, "Do your people listen to secular music?" I always ask, "What is secular music? Is it the beat? Is it the style? You know, if it's from the '80's, does that make it Christian?"

(Laughter)

"Is it the words? What is it that makes it Christian?" They said, "Well, if it's in the Christian bookstore." "What, are you telling me that all the people that are in the Christian bookstore are Christians?" "No." "Okay, then what makes it" – "Hey, come on. Don't ask such quest" – "No, I just wanna know." "Do I like praise music?"

Response: I don't.

No, I don't like praise music.

(Laughter)

Christian praise music is terrible.

(Laughter)

Okay? But, just because I don't like it, could I make rules about Christian praise music?

Response: (Inaudible comment).

I would like to. I'd like to take all the smokers and the people who listen to Christian praise music and extradite them to Idaho, and put a fence up around it.

(Laughter)

And they could smoke and listen to praise music and leave me alone, okay? If I had my way, that's how we would do it. And I'd send – I would send people there, as well, who don't like baseball. That's what I would do.

(Laughter)

"If you don't like baseball, and you smoke, and you like Christian praise music, well go to Idaho because we're Christians. You know, we don't do those sort of things."

(Laughter)

Now, see, do I have the right to do that? No. And I wish I did, but I don't because I'm not God and I can't pass judgment on disputable matters. I can't, okay? Lucky for us all.

I'll read another verse. "One man's faith", verse 2, "allows him to eat everything." Gentlemen, that is not – it's not saying that you should eat everything, by the way. "But, another man whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables." Vegetarians.

(Laughter)

Response: That's not what it's talking about.

That's what it's talking about, brother.

(Laughter)

Vegetarians.

(Laughter)

That's what it's talking – he's like, "No." Here's the deal. I love vegetarians because there's always meat leftover.

(Laughter)

When you have a vegetarian over, they eat all the vegetables. Doesn't trouble me in the least.

(Laughter)

"The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not." Should the meat eater look down on the vegetarian? No. Should the vegetarian look down on the meat eater? "Oh, you're slaughtering animals." "Well, you're slaughtering carrots."

(Laughter)

No, shouldn't look down on each other. You guys are warming up. I appreciate that.

(Laughter)

"For God has" what? "Accepted them both." God says, "This is my son. He loves me. He's a vegetarian. This is my daughter. She loves me. She eats meat. I accept 'em both. Since I accept it, you accept each other. Don't make rules that I didn't make, and don't reject people that I have loved. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? You're not God. To his own master, he stands or falls, and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."

"One man considers one day more sacred than another. Goes to church on Saturday 'cause that was the Jewish Sabbath. Another guy goes to Sunday 'cause that's Jesus' resurrection day. Another man considers every day alike. He'll go to church every day. That's fine for him. "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to the Lord. And he who abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to the Lord, for none of us lives to himself alone. None of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."

Okay, the issue is do you belong to the Lord? Do you love God? Does God love you? Are you a child of God? If so, it's okay to disagree agreeably and to say, "Well, these guys do it this way. I do it this way, but we're not gonna divide over this issue." Do Christians tend to divide over a lot of things that they shouldn't divide over? So, the Lutherans and the Presbyterians drink, and the Methodists, Nazarenes, and the Baptists don't. Alright, and the Nazarenes, the Baptists, and the Independent Bible Church people tend to look down, "Oh, those brothers. They're causing people to stumble." The Lutherans and the Presbyterians tend to look down on everybody else and say, "Oh, they're weak brothers. They're not strong enough to drink."

Paul says, "You know what? God loves 'em both. God forgives 'em both. God's adopted 'em both, and we should just love each other and not fight over such things, okay?" Do weak people need strong people? Sure, so that they can become stronger. Do strong people need weak people? Yeah, so they can learn humility and how to serve and give up their freedom. See, we need each other and dividing into little teams, like all the drinkers go to this

church, and all the non-drinkers go to this church, and all the smokers go to this church, all the non-smokers go to this church. It doesn't make for a very good community. "For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life, verse 9, "so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Why do you look down on your brother, for we all stand before God's judgment seat", he quotes Isaiah. "It is written as surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me. Every tongue will confess to God. So then, each one of us will give an account of himself to God." He says, "Look, we're not to judge each other in this way." Now, when it – are we allowed to judge each other on things that are in the Bible?

Response: Yeah.

Absolutely, 1 Corinthians 5, "Judge those who are in the church on the issues of the Bible." A guy's an alcoholic, we say, "Look, the Bible says, 'Don't get drunk'." The guy's a wife beater, we say 1 Peter 3, Don't be harsh with your wife." A guy who's mean and nasty to his wife, we say, "Look, Ephesians 5. Love her as Christ loves her." A guy's bad to his kids. We say, "Look, do not exasperate your children. Train them in the admonition and instruction of the Lord", Ephesians 6. If it's in the Bible, we definitely can get into that. But, on matters that aren't in the Bible, we have no right to judge each other. We have to leave freedom, which means that when it comes to some of these issues, it's not right and wrong. It's not win and lose. It's win and win, and it's conscience and conscience.

Is it okay to violate your conscience? If you have a strong conviction that, for you, drinking is a sin. Should those of us who don't have that conviction push you to drink and bust your conscience? No. Is it good to violate your conscience and break it? See, your conscience is something that God has given you as a rudder and you break that, you have serious problems. For him who is strong and can drink, is it okay for the rest of us to yell at him until he stops and to get him to violate his conscience? No. And that's the point of verse 13. "Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. That's the point. And it's mutual, okay? The strong people are not allowed to make rules for the weak people that will cause them to sin. And the weak people are not allowed to make rules for the strong people taking away their freedom. Because what they will both do is teach the other to bust their conscience. The weak people will tell the strong, "Bust your conscience and listen to mine." And the strong people will tell the weak people, "No, bust your conscience and listen to mine." And Paul says, "No, both of you, listen to your conscience." It's not good for either of you, either of these teams, these factions in this church, to bust their conscience. It's not good.

Am I saying that Christians should drink? I'm not, am I? I'm saying that you're free in Christ to, but you certainly don't have to. Am I saying that all Christians should eat meat? I'm not. I'm saying you're free in Christ, but you don't have to. What I won't be is God, and sit around and make rules for people. I will preach the Bible and encourage you to pray and to follow your conscience and the Holy Spirit, and not do anything that causes someone else to stumble.

Now, there's two problems that usually come up with this. One, legalists usually make this into a mythical person. "Don't drink 'cause you'll cause someone to stumble." Who? Don't make up a mythical person out there in the netherworld. I need a real, live human being somewhere. Who's gonna stumble? Who's gonna go getting – and the words here are very strong. It's not in the Greek text just that we're causing people to be annoyed with us. It's that we're literally tempting them to sin. What it is is it's like sitting down for dinner.

Let's say, for example, my wife and I have a couple over to dinner and we make – my wife – I mean, we don't make anything – my wife cooks dinner – you don't wanna eat anything I make – my wife makes dinner, lays out a beautiful Italian meal and we pour a glass of wine for you, and we know that you are a recovering alcoholic who's fresh out of rehab, and I put a glass of wine in front of you. Have I sinned? Mmmm Hmmm, 'cause I'm causing you to stumble. 'Causing you to stumble. I should not do that if I love you. If I love you, and I know it really bothers you, should I just abstain from alcohol while I'm in your presence altogether, not drink when I'm with you 'cause I'm gonna 'cause you problems? Does that mean that I abstain from alcohol altogether? No. No, not at all.

That has to – you know, in the same way, if a guy, let's say, is recently divorced and he's very – he's struggling sexually because he – well, let's make it a widow. Say a guy was married for years, loved his wife. They enjoyed each other. Now, all of a sudden, his wife died unexpectedly. And so, sexually, he's struggling greatly. He's very tempted. He's very open and susceptible to sin because he's been used to being intimate with his wife and now that's gone, right? If he comes over to my house and there's four or five newly married couples there that are huggy, kissy, and hanging out, and real affectionate, are those couples in sin? No. But, because he's just went through this trauma, could they be causing him a really hard time because he sees all this loving affection and sexual intimacy between these couples that's appropriate, but it really causes him a difficult time? That could cause him to stumble. So, should those couples, perhaps, abstain from some overt affection in his presence while he's mourning the loss of his wife and recovering from his own grief? Would that be okay? But, does that mean that those couples, therefore, should never kiss again? "Well, honey, I was gonna kiss you. Remember five years ago, Jack was struggling and I don't wanna cause my brother to stumble." See, it gets stupid.

In the presence of people who will stumble over particular issues, we temporarily yield our freedom and give it to them because we love them and it goes both ways. The perfect scenario is this. Let's say there are two couples. One drinks; one doesn't. They sit down for dinner together and they're Christians. One couple has a glass of wine and the other couple says, "Sorry, we don't drink." The one couple then says, "I'm sorry. Am I gonna cause you to stumble? Are you a recovering alcoholic? Is there a problem here?" "No, it's just a conscience issue. I don't drink." "Okay, do you mind if we drink?" "No, we don't mind if you drink." Is it okay for one couple to have a glass of wine with their meal and the other couple to not have a glass of wine with their meal, and they both sit at the table and love each other? That's beautiful, isn't it? Your conscience, my conscience, we both belong to the Lord, we love each other. I don't cause you to stumble. I don't make you drink. You don't cause me to stumble. You don't take away my freedom in Christ. Mutually beneficial.

He says, verse 14, "As one who is in the Lord, Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is no unclean in itself." Nothing is unclean if God made it. "But, if anyone regards something as unclean for him, it is unclean. Conscience, if your brother is distressed" – the Greek word is actually that he is being enticed into sin. It's very strong – "because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not, by your eating, destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of his evil, for the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but, instead, of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us, therefore, make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification." Mutual. This does not mean that weak people get to make all the rules. This does not mean that strong people get to make all the rules. This is not competition, win/lose between God's people. This is, How can you win? And how can they win? How can the strong win? How can the weak win? And how can there be peace between them? Freedom.

"Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble", okay? What this means is you come over to my house, you're a vegetarian, okay? And I'm gonna cook a big Biblical steak. Should I cook something that is vegetarian for you, if I love you? Absolutely, I should. Absolutely, I should. Should I do that in a burdensome way or in a joyous way? In a joyous way because the issue is not what we get to eat. The issue is that I get to eat it with people I love. That's the point. I don't care what we eat. I just wanna enjoy your company, right? That's the point.

"It is better not to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So, whatever you believe about these things", what? "Shut up." It's the Greek text, right. "Shut up."

(Laughter)

Just keep it to yourself. Don't declare war, okay? God's people just tend to think, "Well, I'm holy and if people were like me, they'd be holy to." Paul says, "You know, if that's your conviction, live by it, but don't go around shoving it on other people", right? And this can happen with anything, right? Food, drink, music, breastfeeding. It can be anything. Dating, courtship, length of engagement. I mean, you could fight over almost anything. "Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves, but the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating is not from faith. And everything that does not come from faith is sin. We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good to build him up."

The point is this. Weak people and strong people need to be together. Now, by weak people being with strong people, will they be built up with love, and patience, and Biblical instruction, and encouragement over time? Will weak people become stronger? That's the goal. The goal is not to say, "Strong people go to this church. Weak people go to this church." No, the strong people love the weak people so that they grow to be strong. And it's good for the strong people to hang out with people who are weaker because it forces them to learn to sacrifice, yield, and give, and take care of others, not just themselves. It's good for everyone. It make us all more like Jesus. It's the truth of it.

I'll close with this. There are really only two Gospels. One is a Gospel of works that says, "Okay, we have sinned. We have fallen short of God's glory. We've eaten what we shouldn't have eaten. We have drunk what we shouldn't have drunk. We've done which we shouldn't have done. None of us is perfect. We have all missed God's perfect standard of perfection. Therefore, we will do something to earn our salvation. We'll beat ourselves. We'll starve ourselves. We'll discipline ourselves. We'll tithed lots of money. We'll do lots of good deeds, or we'll make long lists of rules and we'll live up to them, merit or on righteousness. Declare ourselves holy. Stand before God and say, "Let me in because I'm such a great guy. Here's my resume. This is what I did", right? That's a false Gospel.

The true Gospel is, "That we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That none of us has any righteousness of our own. We can't look at God and say, "I'm holy 'cause I didn't drink." "I'm holy 'cause I did drink." "I'm holy 'cause I ate meat." "I'm holy because I'm a vegetarian." I got in an argument recently with a guy and he typified this greatly. And he was at the church that I preach in in the mornings and he said, "Well, I just wanna go to a church where there's righteous men." I said, "Well, are you a righteous man." He says, "I'm a righteous man." I said, "How do you know you're a righteous man?" He said, "Look, I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't do drugs. I don't fraternize with women. I pay my bills. I work hard. I'm honest. I'm a good person." And he went through his list. And I started laughing out loud. And he says, "What? Do you think you're a righteous man?" I said, "I know I'm a righteous man." He said, "Why are you a righteous man?" I said, "'Cause Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead, not 'cause I'm a great guy. Jesus died for a reason – my sin. That seems ample evidence that I'm not a great guy and I can't merit my own salvation, and I'm not gonna stand before God and tell him what a great guy I am and all the things I did."

And, see, that's exactly what happened to me with a drinking issue. For the first 30 years of my life, I didn't drink because I had a conviction that it was a sin for me and I was weak. But, after a while, it ceased being about obedience to my conscience. I was strong enough to drink and I still didn't drink because I wanted to merit my own righteousness. I wanted to say, "Look, I'm holy. I'm good. I'm proud. I've never had a drink. I have complete self control. Look at what a great guy I am. I'm not like those other guys." And that's sin. That's pride. That's arrogance. The Bible says that, "Our righteousness is as a filthy menstrual rags to a holy God, that we cannot please him with our own good works, and we need Jesus."

And so, God comes as Jesus, lives a perfect life for our sin – in place of our sin, rather – dies for our sins, raises from death, gives us his righteousness. I am a righteous man, not because of what I eat or don't eat, or drink or don't drink, or say or don't say, or do or don't do. I'm a righteous man because Jesus Christ is God and King and he has forgiven me and loves me, and he put his life in me. I told this guy, I said, "If you start talking about righteousness and I don't hear the word Jesus, there's a problem." And the problem with all of these issues that trip up our legalisms is each one of us wants to say, "I'm righteous." "No, I'm righteous." "No, I'm righteous." "No, I'm righteous." Jesus says, "You're all unrighteous. I'm righteous. It's about me."

Practically, here's where we go with it. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread. He broke it. He said to his disciples, "This is my body broken for you. When you eat it, remember me." As well, he took the cup. He said, "This wine is now the blood of the new covenant. When you drink of it, remember me." Jesus was promising that his body would be broken, his blood would be shed to give righteousness to his people and to give them new life, hope, joy, and a future, okay?

At your church service here, do we serve wine or juice?

Response: Both here.

Both. Why? Because we love you all and we don't want any of you to stumble. We don't wanna take away the freedom for those that are strong; and we don't wanna cause those who are weak to sin and violate their conscience. So, when you take communion tonight, what you're doing is exactly what the Bible says you should do. Love together, live together, celebrate Christ together and walk according to conscience, knowing that what unifies you is not that you agree on everything, but that you agree on Christ, and he will allow conscience in lesser matters.

And so, if you're a Christian, we invite you to take communion, if you are ready, when you are ready. As well, we'll take an offering, but if you're a visitor or non-Christian, don't give. It's really good to have 'ya and, if you didn't like me, Mike'll be back next week.

(Laughter)

Father God, thanks for a chance to get together to study your Word, to sing, to pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are perfect, that you are righteous, that you are holy, that you are good, that you are God. We thank you that you ate, but never were a glutton. That you drank and never were a drunkard. That you were friends with many women, but you never lusted after them. That you had money that passed through your hands, even though it was not a lot, but you never stole any of it like Judas. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you spoke about a great number of things, but you never told a lie. We thank you that you were perfect, and good, and you are a great God and King.

We thank you this Easter season that you died for our sins, that you rose from death to conquer enemies of Satan, Sin, and death, to give us life that is free and full, and joyous, and that, Lord Jesus, you have been so accommodating to us, that you are enabling us to walk according to conscience and Spirit, and conviction. And that we are not bound by duty or law, but we are bound by love and by grace. And we thank you for it, and we celebrate and take communion tonight in your memory and in your presence. Amen.