

Toward a Biblical View of Addiction

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Many theologians take a dogmatic approach to wine and addiction, and end with a legalistic imperative against wine use or a liberal view justifying the use of wine without restriction.¹ The issue proves far more complex and rich than this traditional approach can reveal. A biblical theological approach to the issue provides a lens through which a church can find wholeness and missional effectiveness in a culture bound in addictive patterns. As the motif unfolds in the covenants of the Bible, wine typifies relational wholeness through the Holy Spirit. The motif unfolds in two threads: (1) a type of joy, fruitfulness, and relief in a fallen world, and (2) a type pointing to judgment. The church that discovers the wholeness to which this type of wine points can renew its effectiveness to a culture bound by addictive behavior and human attempts to seek spirituality apart from God.²

The Bible begins with God's command to be fruitful and subdue the earth in relational unity with God (Gen. 1:28). God conditions His blessings with a command to refrain from eating one particular fruit of the Garden while remaining in a dependent relationship with God as the superior party in the covenant (Gen. 2:17).³ The serpent, however, approaches the first couple with the idea that the blessings of creation reside in a created substance rather than a relationship.⁴ God extends His blessing conditioned by human choice to remain in a

relationship with God as the source of life, but the humans choose to seek life on their own terms.⁵ The source of blessing forms the core of the issue. Humanity must choose between God as the source of wisdom, fruitfulness, and blessing or the substance of the fruit as the source. Seeking a source outside the relational covenant for fulfillment results in separation from the blessing of the covenant.⁶ Sin separates the man and woman from their relationship with God and humanity descends into selfish striving for blessing.⁷ Similar to addiction, in which humans seek results from a substance or behavior that actually separates them from the desired results, humanity looks to ever-increasing doses of rebellion and descends into further separation.⁸

The human tendency to strive continually for the blessings of covenant relationship apart from the relationship forms the core of addiction. Wine, in the biblical record, points to life in covenant relationship through renewed fruitfulness in relationship with God.⁹ Drunkenness, however, reveals humanity's tendency to seek the substance of the typological object rather than the fulfillment of the type. The same action points in two opposite directions depending on the motive of the user. The substance provided by God often takes the place of God as the object of worship and draws the human further into the illusion of control and away from the God who demands control. For example, the temple becomes the means of fulfillment rather than a type pointing to God.

Wine appears as a destructive substance. For instance, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Prov. 20:1).¹⁰ Wine can point to the antitype and reveal something to humanity about God, or it can lead humanity into separation from God if the person relies on the type more than on God. Abusers of wine become societal outcasts and carry the image of waywardness and judgment. Proverbs, for example, paints a clear picture of the stereotypical drunkard (23:29-35): The drunkard “will not be rich” (21:17); “The drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags” (23:21); the drunkard abuses wine and moves further from reality and relational wholeness.

The typology of wine confuses if one does not consider the antitype. Wine points to judgment but also often relates to blessing from God.¹¹ Isaiah’s picture of restoration includes the image of wine as a blessing from God (Isa. 25:6). Solomon portrays wine as a type of relational wholeness (Song of Sol. 1:4, 4:10). The Psalms portray wine as a symbol of relief from distress (Ps. 104:14-15). Ecclesiastes describes wine as something that “gladdens life” (10:19). Wine leads to destruction and serves as a strong metaphor for judgment from God, but it also carries the expectation of gladness and relief from distress. Wine numbs the senses and relieves those surrounded by the sorrow of life in a fallen world, but wine also points to a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit as the ultimate Comforter.

Wine serves as a gift from God to soothe the fallen soul in a former age in which the Spirit is not yet poured out on all flesh. Wine may temporarily sooth the heart, but the temporary nature of wine easily leads to drunkenness and further separation from God. The prophets point to fulfillment in terms of an outpouring of God’s Spirit.

Isaiah calls for the spiritual seeker to return to God: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1). The Spirit will soon be freely available as the Great Comforter of God’s people. Similar to the images of law and the temple in the Mosaic Covenant, the image of wine leaves the seeker looking for completion in a later time in which the seeker’s heart contains the law, the soul contains the temple, and the salve of wine occurs without the price of drunkenness in the presence of the Spirit. Wine, as a type of the Spirit, draws attention to the desperate hope of humanity in a fallen world for something to salve the pain of life through relationship with the Creator.

Many approaches to wine see the issue as moral rather than as a type fulfilled in the person of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus’ perceived use of wine often sanctions or restricts the believer’s use of wine. The issue is most profound if the exegete attempts to read a modern Fundamentalist restriction into the text. Without consideration of the Spirit, to which wine as a type points, the issue descends into moralistic dogma. Jesus’ use of wine, however, points to deeper fulfillment rather than a moral imperative in the life of the believer.

Humanity faces the choice of renewal from God on His terms or further addictive attempts at renewal and spirituality on human terms. John the Baptist, for example, “must not drink wine or strong drink” instead “he will be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:15). John the Baptist foreshadows the renewed believer. Jesus, on the other hand, points to salvation at the Cross and the coming joy of the Spirit and is accused of being a drunkard (Luke 7:34). The people, however, fail to see the joy to which Jesus points and only see the moral

issue. Apart from the renewed relationship to which both point, the issue of alcohol use manifests as another attempt to please God on human terms.

Jesus fills human hunger and thirst in terms of drink and bread. His followers will eat His flesh and drink his blood (John 6:54-56). At the Last Supper, Jesus seals the New Covenant with bread and wine. He echoes the grain and drink offering of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 24:11). The spiritual seeker fails to find wholeness in the substance of bread and wine, but finds wholeness in the fulfillment of the type in the person of Christ.¹² Christ's sacrifice undoes the sinful seeking of spirituality through a substance. The wine of the renewed relationship becomes the spiritual drink of Christ's blood of sacrifice. Wine itself cannot bring life; it only reveals humanity's need for life. Wine points to the blood of Christ as the fulfillment of humanity's desire for blessing and life.

Addiction is a futile attempt at restoration through the application of more of a substance despite the fact that the substance brings the user into further isolation from God. Efforts to find spiritual wholeness on human terms and in human control form addictions. Some of the Pharisees serve as an example. They interpreted and controlled the law as attempts to control God and other humans rather than relate to God and humans. Their addiction manifested itself through hair-splitting and rigid interpretations of the law that sought to make the failed human effort at spiritual wholeness work. Jesus mocks the errant Pharisees' futile efforts, and He stands in stark contrast to human efforts at spirituality. Jesus breaks human addiction by removing the pain of judgment and promising something better in a restored relationship with God.¹³

The type of wine reaches completion at the Cross and fully appears in the believers

at Pentecost (Acts 2). Observers of the outpouring of Pentecost, however, fail to separate the blessing and judgment, and immediately interpret the event as mere drunkenness (2:13). They fail to understand the work on the Cross as Christ taking their judgment on himself. To the observers, the threads of judgment and blessing remain linked. At Pentecost, the blessing of God is poured out, and Jesus takes the judgment on himself. The fulfillment previously sought in human effort flows freely without the judgment and addictive tendencies.¹⁴

Peter rises before the crowd of skeptics to explain that the outpoured blessing is more than drunkenness (Acts 2:15-16). Peter, in essence, says, "This is what we have looked for since humanity fell in the Garden." The fulfillment of the promise of fruitfulness, dominion, relationship, and joy has appeared. Repentance brings the blessing of the Spirit (vv. 38-39). Humans must turn from seeking fulfillment on their own terms and accept God's free gift on His terms. The Spirit draws the seeker forward toward fulfillment and reveals the insufficiency of human efforts. The perfection of the new makes the incompleteness of the old seem small.¹⁵

Many churches push the covenant relationships of God past covenant to the point of dispensation. The outpouring of the Spirit becomes an experience relegated to the first century, and the use of wine becomes simply a moral issue. Abstinence becomes another vain attempt to appropriate spiritual wholeness in human effort. Apart from the experience of Pentecost, a church often looks like most of the Jewish nation before Pentecost. Human strength or willpower becomes a pathway for seeking spiritual fulfillment. Churches often instruct the addict to be strong and stop the addiction in order to please God. Judgment reenters the story and the addict is again seen as a person facing judgment from God due to his

or her weak moral fortitude. With Pentecost as the fulfillment of the type of wine, nothing could be further from God's plan. God provides freedom from addiction through forgiveness and relational fulfillment in the Holy Spirit.

Many approaches to the issue of alcohol pull Scriptures from their context without understanding that the addicted person seeks spiritual fulfillment through his or her addiction. The addict may simply fail to realize that what he or she seeks in the imperfect substance of wine is available in the presence of the Spirit. The church must model spiritual wholeness in terms of joy, relationship, fruitfulness, and missional effectiveness. The addict may well be more spiritual than the legalist Christian as the addict at least still searches for something more. The addict and the legalistic Christian are both addicted to substances or methods that fail to bring the promised results. The addict seeks more wine, and the legalist seeks more rules and control while attempting to force others into their addiction to rules and control.

The passages of Scripture relating alcohol use and the life of those in the church prove difficult to understand apart from a typological view of alcohol. When the type finds fulfillment, the type ceases to be useful.¹⁶ Once the destination is reached, a map is useless. If spiritually fulfilled through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the believer has no use for wine. Paul instructs deacons and elders, for instance, not to be "addicted to much wine" or "slaves to much wine" (1 Tim. 3:8; Titus 2:3). A person under the control of wine cannot lead others to fulfillment in the Spirit as they would still be searching themselves. The use of alcohol among leaders as a moral issue is not the point of the text; the direction of the believer who seeks fulfillment in wine or the fullness of the Holy Spirit is the issue.

Paul warns that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10; Gal. 5:21). Since fulfillment of the Kingdom begins at the Cross and realizes in the believer in the overflowing experience of Pentecost, a person still under the addictive pattern of alcohol has failed to encounter the fulfillment of the Kingdom. They fail to inherit the Kingdom because they do not seek the Kingdom. They seek the benefits of the Kingdom in their own control through the illusion of control in a substance. Addiction carries the person further from the desired effects and deeper into the use of the substance. Whether the substance is alcohol, legalism, or any idolatry, the person has not repented or turned from his or her sinful desire to discover spiritual wholeness on his or her own terms and in his or her own illusion of control.

Paul portrays the drunkard as a person still in darkness: "Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning" (1 Cor. 15:34). He describes drunkenness as something done at night or in incomplete revelation (1 Thess. 5:7).¹⁷ The addicted person is a spiritual person who, in many cases, is simply in darkness concerning the completeness offered in a relationship with Jesus through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The church that fails to reveal the light of a renewed relationship in an active infilling of the Holy Spirit lives as much in the dark as the chemically addicted. Gossip, legalism, gluttony, and many other behaviors simply become sinful replacements for chemical addiction if the church community fails to meet the inner need for spiritual fulfillment.

Paul's focus on wine and the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 5:18 provides the centerpiece of the issue. A believer has no need for wine that leads a person further from the source of life. He or she should observe the spiritual desire typified by wine and recognize that the Spirit makes a far superior means of

fulfillment available. Through the continual infilling of the Holy Spirit, the believer has no use for the inferior type of wine. The Spirit makes the antitype freely available and the type is obsolete as the type only points to the need for fulfillment. Pleasing God through abstinence as a moral issue does not form the main point of the passage. Paul emphasizes acceptance of God's plan rather than consuming the fruit of prideful and fallen human effort.

Humans have a God-given thirst for deeper spirituality and restored relationship. Pride causes humans to seek spirituality on human terms and in human control. The thirst, however, comes from God to draw fallen humans to the restoration of His presence paid for at the Cross. The substance abuser seeks a salve for the pain of fallen humanity. The salve proves temporary and leads the user further into the spiral of addiction in which the user seeks more of the substance in ever more futile attempts to ease the pain of the world. The addicted simply have never encountered the Spirit of God to which wine points in the Bible.

Biblical Solutions for Addiction

The question of a Christian drinking wine proves complex. Approached dogmatically, a person can answer the question in the positive or negative depending on the starting point. Approached through the unfolding of covenant theology, the question no longer asks whether a Christian can drink wine or not. With the availability of the fullness of the Spirit, the question becomes, "Why would a Spirit-filled Christian need the effects of wine?" Wine prefigures the relationship with Christ available through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Drinking wine or any addictive pattern, therefore, provides an experience far beneath the completeness available to the Christian in the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ The issue

relates to motive rather than dogma. The question of alcohol consumption by a Christian remains more about the motive of control and the original desire to seek spirituality apart from God's plan than it is of moral obligation.

Churches must not address addiction as a simple moral issue. The drunkard seeks spirituality in the only known source in many cases. Mark R. Laaser, George Ohlschlager, and Tim Clinton observe the addict's hopeless search for fulfillment:

Addicts don't know a better life. In most cases addicts don't know true love and intimacy—they don't know a true relationship with God. Addictions are embraced as the perverse substitutes—false love and false intimacy.¹⁹

The addict or codependent organization may simply seek the same thing the Spirit-filled believer has found except they are unaware of the greater antitype of the Holy Spirit and have accepted the lesser type of wine. A church must provide more than moral imperative to the addict concerning wine or drug use; it must demonstrate the completeness of a relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Laaser, Ohlschlager, and Clinton describe ministry to the addicted person seeking genuine spirituality:

One of the greatest challenges in working with addicts is in helping them exchange the short-term highs for long-term truth. Intimacy with God and others is so much more satisfying than the high of any addiction.²⁰

The Spirit-filled community of the church should freely offer everything the addict looks for in addiction.

The community, as a healthy system, is essential.²¹ Gordon Fee discusses Ephesians 5:18, in terms of community, as it relates to

the sins listed before the verse and the songs, praise, and submitted living following the verse. He states that Paul emphasizes the formation of a Spirit-filled community “whose life is so totally given over to the Spirit that the life and deeds of the Spirit are as obvious in their case as the effects of too much wine are obvious to the other.”²² The addict encountering the Spirit-filled community of God should easily see the completeness to which they have been looking in the incompleteness of addiction.

The issue then is more complex than absolute abstinence from wine. Paul’s instruction to Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach problems serves as an example (1 Tim. 5:23). Motive forms the core of the issue. Paul does not instruct Timothy to use wine to seek comfort from the world’s fallen state or to seek spirituality. Paul tells him to use wine medicinally as a person might take a prescription for a physical ailment. The substance of wine is not evil; the motive of the user makes wine use evil.

Believers might find in Jesus’ use of wine some reason for wine use by Christian missionaries in cultures in which wine is integral to fellowship. The user, as in any cross-cultural encounter, must be certain as to the motive. Absolute restriction of wine

use by Christians does not seem to be the purpose of the biblical passages relating to wine. Douglas A. Oss observes the biblical narrative’s primary function in pointing the seeker to a relationship with Christ: “We have the Bible to lead us to a relationship with Jesus. Where the Bible does not split hairs we should not split hairs.”²³ Motive remains the key issue concerning wine use among Christians.

The question of wine use among Christians is more than a simple moral issue or one of legal restriction. It is a question of why a person would seek the contradictory and impartial substance rather than the completeness of a relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The church, as a missional community, will have little power in the culture if it fails to stand apart from the culture. The church that seeks completeness in legalism, possessions, political power, and the like, fails to stand apart from the culture of addiction as it still looks to something other than the Spirit for completeness. Proudful ambition and human controlled spirituality are not far removed from the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden.

¹ For examples of various applied positions on alcohol use, see “On Alcohol use in America,” The Southern Baptist Convention, accessed June 18, 2013, www.sbc.net/resolutions/amresolution.asp?ID=1156; John L. Rabb, “Guidelines for the Use of Alcoholic Beverages at Church Functions or on Church Property within the Diocese of Maryland,” accessed June 19, 2013, www.ang-md.org/alcohol-service-gidelines.pdf; and “Abstinence,” The General Council of the Assemblies of God, accessed June 18, 2013, http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_4187_abstinence.pdf.

² Karl Barth calls God the “genuine Counterpart” and points to God as the fulfillment of all human longing. He states, “God is indeed the genuine Counterpart which alone can finally and primarily satisfy human beings and all creation as such.” Karl Barth, “Selections from Church Dogmatics (1932-1967),” in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green, 171-264 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 171.

³ William Dumbrell describes the nature of the pre-fall covenant as entailing “the obligation to understand the nature of the relationship and the duty to maintain it by exercising a God-centered life.” William J. Dumbrell,

Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 33-34. The Fall, therefore, is a denial of God-centered living and a descent into forming identity on other basis than God.

⁴ The fruit had no substantial consequence inherent in itself, and sin is in no way a substance. Adam and Eve, however, believed there was some substantial benefit within the substance of the fruit. They looked to a substance rather than God. They, like the chemically addicted, look for spirituality in a substance. Stanley Grenz describes something as “substantial” if it “‘stands under’ or goes into the making of a person.” Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 155. Adam and Eve looked to the substance of the forbidden fruit to establish their identity apart from God.

⁵ Paul Tillich makes the case that any object can be sacramental as long as “the transcendent is perceived to be present.” The distinction between holy and demonic, to Tillich, is found in God’s “unconditional demand.” Adam and Eve, to Tillich, would be attempting to make an object sacramental in that it imparts life apart from God’s command. Paul Tillich, *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries*, ed. Mark Kline Taylor (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 91.

⁶ Grenz defines sin as “our failure to reflect the image of God.” Grenz, 187. Since the image of God is in the context of “life in community” sin is a failure of community both in fellowship with God and with fellow humans; Grenz, 179. Grenz continues, “In its essence, sin is also whatever disrupts and seeks to destroy the community God seeks to establish. Summarily stated, sin is the destruction of community.” *Ibid.*, 187.

⁷ Tillich describes the state of humanity after the Fall as a descent into loss of humanity’s “determining center.” He states, “Self-loss as the first and basic mark of evil is the loss of one’s determining center; it is the disintegration of the centered self by disruptive drives which cannot be brought into unity;” Tillich, 205.

⁸ Original sin may best be seen as a community phenomenon. The image of God denied in Adam and Eve’s sin manifests in the community through division and murder. Grenz writes, “What ought to drive us to a quest for God and the fulfillment of our destiny to participate in the community of God degenerates into a search for a humanly devised substitute. We thereby miss the mark and suffer the consequences;” Grenz, 206.

⁹ Leland Ryken, “Wine,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 953-954.

¹⁰ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version.

¹¹ Grenz describes the interrelation of love and God’s wrath and judgment, “The possibility of experiencing love as wrath arises out of the nature of love itself. Bound up with love is protective jealousy.” When wrath is missing from love “love degenerates into mere sentimentality;” Grenz, 73.

¹² Tillich discusses the Protestant tendency to separate the elements rather than unify the elements as in the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. The bread points to daily sustenance in Christ while the wine along with the bread points to “the presence of the divine saving power in the natural basis of all spiritual life as well as in the spiritual life itself;” Tillich, 86.

¹³ Ray S. Anderson defines redeemed humanity as “free to hear and respond to God,” “free to respond to the other person as a counterpart to one’s own personhood,” able to “find and fulfill one’s nature and destiny in a symbiotic relation with the created world and its environment,” and able to “be concretely ‘this person’ belonging to ‘these people,’ while at the same time open to and responsible for the good of all people.” Anderson’s description describes a life in community similar to life in community free from codependent dysfunction and expectations. Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 170.

¹⁴ Tillich describes Pentecost as the centering of humanity. Having lost their centeredness at the Fall, Pentecost reestablishes through ecstasy the centered unity of God through faith, relational unity, and universality expressed through mission; Tillich, 279-280.

¹⁵ Anderson observes the supremacy of Pentecost to the previous life of separation from the fullness of the Spirit, “Pentecost promises a paraclete to everyone who stumbles and falls, to everyone who is weak and powerless, to everyone who is tormented and torn by the demons of doubt, discouragement and despair;” Anderson, 204.

¹⁶ Anderson observes the new structure necessary: “The effects of sin are not overcome through a more rigorous form of spirituality but through a renewed structure of sociality;” *Ibid.*, 168. The Spirit redeems the community from dysfunction, and in the redeemed community the sinner finds salvation and holiness.

¹⁷ E. Earl Ellis reminds that Paul is “not concerned to lay down rules for society.” Paul instead “directs his apostolic teaching only to the Christian community.” E. Earl Ellis, *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 54.

¹⁸ Guy Duffield and Nathaniel Van Cleve describe the incompleteness of seeking spiritual fulfillment through a substance rather than God: “The world seeks alcoholic wine for stimulation and merriment, but the Christian receives enhancement of his abilities and true joyfulness from the Spirit of God who indwells him. The world’s spirits give a lift with a let-down; the believer’s anointing with oil and wine brings inspiration without desperation.” Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles, CA: Foursquare, 1983), 117.

¹⁹ Mark R. Laaser, George Ohlschlager, and Tim Clinton, “Addictions,” in *Caring for People God’s Way: Personal and Emotional Issues, Addictions, Grief, and Trauma* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2005), 268.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Roger Stronstad emphasizes the importance of spiritual community: “The difference between the charismatic activity of the Spirit throughout Israelite history and the age to come is one of magnitude; the gift of the Spirit to individuals or groups will give way to the gift of the Spirit to the community;” Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 26. The emphasis in the Spirit’s current activity in the church is, therefore, the community itself, and His activity within the community of believers is oriented toward the edification of the community rather than any one believer.

²² Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 721.

²³ Douglas A. Oss, “Biblical Theology in Ministry” (class notes for D.Min. course at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, February 25, 2013).