

# Grace for the Day

www.gracefortheday.org  
Incorporated non-profit in New Jersey, USA

## Alcoholism among Teens and Adults

By Rev. Peter Eng

Summer is here! This is a time many high school grads and other teens begin to drink. Not long ago, a young lady went to Aruba on her senior year trip and took that opportunity to go drinking and doping. She went missing, and to this day, we do not know what happened to her. Teen drinking is not a trifling matter. Drinking in an unsafe environment is truly dangerous. While this may be doubly true for young ladies, it is true for everyone, even adults.

How should Christians view the use of alcohol? Are you a teen asking about alcohol? Are you a parent with a teen? Regardless of your age, do you have a code of conduct when it comes to the use of alcohol? This article deals with how Christians can handle the use of alcohol.

### Our Biases

We like to think we are above our culture, but in reality, we are children of our time, and if we consciously seek to rise above our culture, we might become more impartial or objective.

American Christianity is perhaps the only community that has a sizable representation of teetotalers. The Prohibition (when alcohol was made illegal) was an unusual social experiment in America. For better or for worse, the generally more conservative use of alcohol in America has resulted in less underage alcoholism than her European cousins. But alcohol abuse among adults in

America is disproportionately high. Some sources suggest alcoholism at 6% of the population.

W.H.O. observes that the abuse of alcohol is the most prevalent addictive substance at the global level. All this tells us is that alcohol is legal in almost all countries, hence its abuse is the most prevalent. Alcohol is generally illegal only in Muslim countries. Even this needs qualification as certain Muslim countries do not prohibit it (e.g. Malaysia) and others give Christians a special permit to buy alcohol (e.g. Pakistan).

Despite the Abolition, the majority of Christians in America and around the world do not prohibit alcohol. This calls for an investigation on how we should relate to it.

### Biblical Teachings

The Bible does not prohibit the use of alcohol. But it is clear that the Bible does not condone drunkenness (Prov 20:1; Eph 5:18) or alcoholic addiction (Isa 5:11). There are many negative descriptions and the Bible is full of warnings about drunkenness and addiction to alcohol. The dangers associated with alcohol do not translate into a prohibition, in the same way the dangers of lusting for money do not prohibit its ownership or use.

Some justify our use of alcohol to its medicinal value. The Bible clearly allows for the therapeutic use of alcohol on account of its euphoric properties. Alcohol may justly

be given as a palliative and to ease anguish or pain (Prov 31:6; 1 Tim 5:23). In today's world, it may be some medication to address a bout of depression.

Today, practically every medicinal use of alcohol can be done better through some other means. Perhaps the only exceptions are the newly discovered virtues of alcohol in relation to longevity and heart health. But it will not be long before these become superseded by safer and better alternatives. The medical or health value of alcohol may soon be passé. And if that should happen, we can be sure people will still drink. Why?

A more fundamental reason for consuming alcohol is that it produces euphoria. Alcoholic addiction is an addiction to the euphoric effect of alcohol. However, beyond a certain point, the effect becomes dysphoria (anxiety and restlessness) with vomiting. Continued consumption can lead to loss of consciousness and even death.

We cannot talk honestly about alcohol without addressing its euphoric effect. It is interesting to note that the euphoric effect of alcohol is permitted in the Bible. The farmers who worked hard all year were told they should eat and drink to their heart's content as thanksgiving before the LORD (Deut 14:26). What is telling about this injunction is that the drinking is done before the LORD. Therein lies a critical consideration for us. This is drinking in celebration. The environment is safe, and the drinking is responsible, bearing in mind that this is thanksgiving before the LORD. It is clear that the drinking should not abuse the body.

The euphoric effect of alcohol should not be seen as a vice. The Bible accepts alcohol for its euphoric value. What is important for us to note is that its use to produce euphoria should be infrequent. The biblical example suggests only once a year. At such infrequency, addiction is impossible. We will not be legalistic and try to determine how often Christians can drink. The principle is

that the euphoric use of alcohol should be infrequent.

### **Relevance for teens**

In many parts of America, a person cannot consume alcohol until he is 21. The irony is not lost to young people that one can make a decision to fight and die for his country at age 18, but cannot drink until he is 21.

What surprised me when I came to America is to learn that in some states, it is illegal for parents to give alcohol to their children within their own homes (VT, PA, WV, VA, IN, etc.). Apparently, this is to prevent a situation where condoning parents supply prodigious amounts of alcohol for their kids' parties, leaving the kids drunk and damaged. Responsible parenting should preclude such collusion with teens to promote drunkenness.

Legislating the use of alcohol in the home is well intentioned, but it is a questionable piece of legislation, and I shall ignore this matter as I formulate recommendations on how Christians should use alcohol.

### **My recommendation**

Christian parents have a responsibility in explaining alcohol to their children. This is no different from the need to talk to them about sex, (except that alcohol is probably an easier topic). Parents should assume that at some point in their lives, their children will consume alcohol and good parenting calls us to give our children the necessary support.

Young people need to understand that underage drinking is damaging to the body. An immature body can handle only small amounts of alcohol, and an immature brain can become more easily addicted. Teens need to know they can harm themselves significantly if they consume alcohol too early in life.

If alcohol is consumed in your home, it is likely that your children will be curious. I

think it is appropriate for parents to satisfy their curiosity about how wine or beer tastes. But this is strictly a sampling. This should be accompanied with clear instruction on the dangers of abuse.

One firm rule / guideline I have for my children is that alcohol may not be consumed with friends in parties or any inappropriate context.

The principle at play is that if they choose to use alcohol when they grow up, the highest priority must be to recognize the inherent dangers in the use of alcohol. This means it should never be used in excess and the context of its use must always be safe.

Drinking outside the home hugely increases the incidence of drunk driving, improper moral conduct, violence, etc. In any situation where drinking is a prelude to loose social conduct, we should maintain abstinence. Loose conduct is not consistent with our faith or testimony of faith.

If you knew me in my growing up years, you would think I was a teetotaler. I was a practicing teetotaler, though I was not a theological teetotaler. When I was in the military, beer was tax free. It is the beverage of choice for my army mates. They would get drunk occasionally, but their intoxication did not usually produce trouble. Still, I regarded the context as inappropriate for the use of alcohol and consistently abstained from it. This was an easier position to take with my mates than to drink sometimes and abstain at other times.

The use or abstinence from alcohol should be tied in to the effect it produces in us. Some become aggressive, some talkative, some uninhibited, some sleepy, etc. For some, the first sip does not stop until total intoxication has occurred.

Christian living is responsible living. This principle has to be rigorously applied to the use of alcohol. If alcohol produces some undesirable effect in us, we should seriously consider abstinence.

Young people should delay the consumption of alcohol because the body is not ready for it.

Everyone, young and old, should understand that while the Bible does not prohibit the use of alcohol, even for its euphoric effect, the biblical example points to a safe and appropriate context for the use of alcohol. Alcohol is a powerful and potentially dangerous substance that is also prone to abuse. All who choose not to be teetotalers must learn the discipline of using it with Christian responsibility, which includes an appropriate environment.

20070701



Please pass this on  
so that many more can be blessed.

Want a **FREE** subscription?  
Send an email to [subscribe@gracefortheday.org](mailto:subscribe@gracefortheday.org)  
with Subject: SUBSCRIBE

Listen to Rev. Peter's **sermons** and find **other articles**  
in [www.gracefortheday.org](http://www.gracefortheday.org)

Wish to support this ministry? Have any questions?  
Write to: [admin@gracefortheday.org](mailto:admin@gracefortheday.org)

**Rev. Peter Eng** is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.