

Intoxication?

If you have shot a gun, then you know by experience that if you move the angle of the barrel just an inch, then you can miss the target by a foot. The bullet can be shifted off course by yards just by a little nudge. The trajectory of a bullet is similar to the pathway of our lives: both can be altered by the slightest of causes. The decisions we make, the habits we form, the relationships we keep, and the events that occur work together to lay our path before us. Especially in the days of our youth, our actions have consequences that last long through our life. The devil prowls about throughout the earth seeking to devour you and me. He tries to destine our life for destruction, and often does so by slightly shifting us off course—just by a look, a thought, a word, a touch. Since the years of our youth are so formative, Satan works hard to block the narrow way that leads to life from us during this stage of life. A common enticement that claims many is intoxication, whether by alcohol, marijuana, or other substances. While you have probably heard about reasons to abstain from these things in school, I want us to consider some of what the Bible has to say about them.

We have spent much time recently in the early chapters of Genesis, which give the account of the creation of the world. After God finished his work at the end of each day, he saw that it was good. Psalm 104 celebrates how God has created everything good, including the vegetation he causes to grow for mankind. **“You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.”** The magnificent God has created a world full of wonder. We can be nourished by baking bread, roasting meat, and steaming vegetables. Certain ailments can be healed with crushed leaves of herbs. Notice also that these verses note how the good things of the ground also give our heart nourishment, in a spiritual sense. The comfort and delight we receive from a delicious, steaming Thanksgiving feast is far more than just physical pleasure, it also strengthens our soul. All of this goodness comes from the open hands of God. The goodness of the Creator is even found in barley, grape, tobacco, and marijuana plants. There are legitimately God-honoring ways to enjoy these plants and their products (medicinally, for example). They should be received with thanksgiving; and if one uses them, they should be used wisely in moderation.

However, remember that Genesis 3 follows the account of creation and tells of Adam and Eve’s sin, which has spread through all of their children. Remember also that God cursed us because of sin, and even cursed the earth. Now, the earth also bears plants that are harmful to us;

even in our own region, pokeberry, hemlock, and poison ivy are common plants that can kill us. The curse has evidently invaded the plants whose products are addictive and harm the brain, heart, lungs, teeth, or blood. Furthermore, we are sinful. We use the good and cursed things of creation in ways that disregard God. Although there are legitimate ways to use the things of the earth that please God, there are also many illegitimate ways to use the things of the earth that displease God. The Bible very clearly condemns drunkenness, which by implication is a condemnation of getting high, which is just another form of intoxication. Intoxication is sinful.

The devil can make anything appealing. You may be the type of person who thinks you will never drink or do drugs. And that may be true. But be on guard against our ancient foe who knows us well. Remember that he deceived Eve into eating fruit that God has previously said would kill her. The devil can make anything appealing. The Holy Spirit has given some more of his wisdom on drinking alcohol in Proverbs 23:29-35. Please read this entire passage; I will only include verses 31-32 to save space here: **“Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.”** These verses appeal to our senses by describing the attractive nature of the wine with its color and taste. Yet it also appeals to those same senses to divert our desires away from it by saying that it also brings pain like the stinging teeth of a venomous viper.

This passage in Proverbs depicts part of the temptation that occurs when partaking of different substances similar to alcohol. People are tempted to drink and smoke partially because there is a physical pleasure to it. It is hard for us to resist anything that is enjoyable to the body. Young people are especially tempted to do these things in order to show off their maturity and independence. They want to show to their friends that they are fully capable of boldly making their own decisions apart from their parents. They also are seduced into substance abuse by seeking acceptance from their peers. We all want to be admired, respected, and accepted. Who doesn't want to be attractive, cool, and funny, and belong to the same kind of people? People often get sucked into partying because they are willing to do whatever it takes to please or impress certain people. Having the strong desire to please and impress people makes you susceptible to all kinds of evil.

Proverbs 23 also tells us the toll of giving in to temptation, saying that drunkards have woe, sorrow, strife, complaints, wounds, and delirium. Those who become drunk or high have physical consequences for their actions, both short-term and long-term. Furthermore, when one

is drunk or high, one is in a state suited for more sin. Having lost their reasoning mind, they are weaker to further temptation and add sin to more sin, like sexual immorality, violence, and vandalism. Addiction also follows the misuse of these products, which traps people throughout their life and often causes their death. Do not think that you are beyond addiction. At Thanksgiving, it is hard for people to stop eating because the food is delicious. If it is hard for us to curb our appetite for food, how much harder do you think it will be to stop ourselves from over-indulging in a substance that actually has addictive properties?

Worse than all of these effects, being drunk or high is sinful. The spiritual decay you experience as you partake in these things is far worse than the toll on the body. These things are sinful because the person is feeding the pleasures of the flesh selfishly and without self-control. This leads to further losing their reasoning capacities—an essential component of being an image-bearer—when they are drunk or high. While one sins in this way, he or she moves farther and farther away from God by rejecting him and his ways. Each time, the person hardens their hearts to him and finds more delight in the things of the world rather than the Father.

Power to resist temptation and overcome sin is available to us through the Spirit. Read Galatians 5:16-26, and you will see that the Spirit is against the desires of the flesh, which includes drunkenness. The very Spirit of God who has the power to create the world and raise Jesus from the dead is available to all who trust in Jesus. Our Triune God is truly a Savior who can deliver us from the power of our sins—that is a mighty Savior. The Christian has put their sin to death by believing in Christ and being raised to new life with him. Christian, **“Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”** It is fellowship with God and by his power that we are able to be set free from sin. Friendship with God is what matters most; knowing him is our greatest delight. And isn't it wonderful that he is gracious to us by inviting us to be friends with him? Isn't wonderful that he has given us freedom to wisely enjoy all things in him—including the various plants of the earth—for his glory?

By looking at just a few of the passages in Scripture concerning intoxication, I hope you see that it is good to enjoy with gratefulness everything that God has made, even alcohol (when you are at a legal age). I hope you have also seen the dangers of slipping into the sin of intoxication, which often is attached to more and more sin. These things require wisdom from the Spirit to know what we should partake in and what we should abstain from. The Bible says much more about this topic, but I hope this sets you off in the right direction.