

# A POSITION PAPER ON THE USE OF ALCOHOL FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PENTECOSTAL HOLINESS CHURCH

## ABSTRACT

From the beginning the International Pentecostal Holiness Church has maintained a strong position against the use and abuse of alcoholic beverages. Convinced that the encouragement of alcohol consumption damages individuals, families, and communities—and that the Bible teaches abstinence instead of drinking in moderation—we have consistently worked from a motivation of love for people to limit the detrimental impacts of alcohol. While acknowledging that the acceptance of moderate alcohol consumption appears to be increasing in some evangelical circles, we view this as an opportunity to draw on our historical and exegetical traditions to provide teaching that protects the innocent and sets the captive free from destructive bondage.

## HISTORY

In our Church's first published *Discipline* in 1911, the General Rules section summarized the Pentecostal Holiness Church position on alcohol in a single word:

*“We are commanded in God’s Word...to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1), such as the use, growth, sale or handling of tobacco in every form, or of morphine, or intoxicants...”*<sup>1</sup>

In the 1921 *Discipline*, the rule against using tobacco and alcohol in any form was expanded as noted here: *“The same restrictions are also placed on intoxicants, morphine, and all drinks containing narcotics.”* (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Cor. 10:31)<sup>2</sup>

A dozen years later, the General Conference separated tobacco and alcohol, devoting an entire rule condemning alcoholic beverages, as indicated by this language in the 1933 *Discipline*:

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<sup>1</sup> « Section IV General Rules » *Constitution and General Rules of The Pentecostal Holiness Church 1911*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1911, pp. 14-15

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, G.F. ed. “Section III General Rules » *Discipline of the Pentecostal Holiness Church 1921*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Royston, GA: The Publishing House of The Pentecostal Holiness Church, 1921. p. 23

*“The Pentecostal Holiness Church is utterly opposed to the manufacture, sale, and use of all intoxicants, and any other drink or drug detrimental in its effects.” (2 Cor. 7:1)<sup>3</sup>*

This wording represented the official IPHC position on alcohol use for 36 years. After that time the General Conference strengthened the prohibition with a clear and forceful statement in the General Rules section of the 1969 Manual:

*“The Pentecostal Holiness Church forbids its members to manufacture, sell, or use all intoxicants, and any other drink or drug detrimental in its effects.” (2 Cor. 7:1)<sup>4</sup>*

Notice the wording changed from the Pentecostal Holiness Church being “utterly opposed” to the more personal and direct “The Pentecostal Holiness Church forbids its members” to produce, distribute, or consume intoxicating beverages.

1989 marked a significant year of change in the way that the IPHC communicated its position on key issues. The sectional heading “General Rules” was replaced with a less rigid sounding “Covenant of Commitment” in the 1989 Manual. The opening paragraph of this new language concluded with the admonition that *“Every facet of our lives must come under divine authority”* (1 Cor. 10:31).<sup>5</sup> The first sub-section emphasized in this area was “OUR BODIES.”

*“Since our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and instruments of righteousness (1 Cor. 6:19; Romans 6:13), we must keep our bodies clean and consecrated for the Master’s use. From the beginning of our existence as a denomination we have expected our members to abstain from the use of tobacco, alcoholic beverages, and addictive drugs.”<sup>6</sup>*

This “expectation” of abstinence from alcohol use now spans over a century in the IPHC. The current 2017 Manual echoes the above directive for IPHC members:

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<sup>3</sup> “Section VI General Rules” *Discipline of The Pentecostal Holiness Church 1933*. Franklin Springs, GA: The Publishing House of the Pentecostal Holiness Church. p. 40

<sup>4</sup> Williams, J.F. et al., editors. “Section VI General Rules” *The Pentecostal Holiness Church Manual 1969*. Franklin Springs, GA: Advocate Press. 1969. pp. 59-60

<sup>5</sup> Underwood, B.E., et al, eds. “Section VI Covenant of Commitment.” *The International Pentecostal Holiness Church 1989 Manual*. Franklin Springs, GA: Advocate Press, 1990. p. 105

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 96

*“We expect our members to abstain from the use and promotion of tobacco, alcoholic beverages, and any illegal addictive drugs, as well as addictive legal drugs, over-the-counter or prescribed, except under the supervision of a physician.” (2 Cor. 7:1) <sup>7</sup>*

The IPHC has been remarkably consistent in its stance on the need for members to refrain from consuming alcoholic beverages for over one hundred years. Historically, the church has not only cried out against the abuse and misuse of intoxicating drinks, but against the very use of them as well. What has not always been clear is the reason for the denomination to maintain such a standard. That is the primary purpose of this paper.

## **BIBLICAL**

The one point that all students of Scripture can agree on concerning the use of alcohol is that drunkenness is clearly condemned in both the Old and New Testaments. Note the evidence:

- The tragic outcomes of Noah and his sons (Genesis 9:20-27) and Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38) when they became drunk.
- God’s pronouncement of “woe” to those who pursue strong drink. (Isa. 5:11-12)
- Drunkards can not enter the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21)
- Drunkenness is contrary to Christian living. (1 Peter 4:3-4)

The current issue concerns the question of whether it is permissible for Christians to drink alcoholic beverages if they do not become drunk. Several factors complicate this matter. First, every usage of the English word “wine” in Scripture is not referring to alcohol. Second, strong drink in biblical times contained much less of an alcoholic content than modern beverages.

There are several Hebrew words in the Old Testament for alcoholic drinks. The primary word is “*Yayin*” which is a generic term that can indicate either fermented (Gen. 9:20-21; 19:32-33; 1 Sam. 25:36-37; Prov. 23:30-31) or unfermented wine (Isa. 16:10; Jer. 40:10; 48:32-33; Lam. 2:12). “*Shekar*” is a word most often translated strong drink. And “*Tirosh*” is a word meaning

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<sup>7</sup> Gardner, J. Talmadge, et al., eds. “Article VII Covenant of Commitment.” *International Pentecostal Holiness Church Manual 2017-2021*, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, 2018. p. 64

“new wine” or “harvest wine.” It can refer to the unfermented fruit of the vine, grapes in a cluster, or new, sweet, unfermented grape juice. It is never used for fermented wine.<sup>8</sup>

The Greek word “*Oinos*” was used to translate the Hebrew words and could mean either fermented or unfermented grape juice. Only the context can determine which usage was in the writer’s mind. For example, “Be not drunk with wine” (*oinos*) in Ephesians 5:18 clearly refers to alcoholic beverages. However, the word *tirosh* is translated *oinos* some 36 times in the New Testament. Therefore, it is a serious mistake to assume that every time the word “wine” is mentioned in the New Testament it is referring to alcohol. The context must determine the meaning.<sup>9</sup>

An unbiased study of the Old Testament causes such readers to conclude that alcoholic beverages should be avoided for the following reasons:

- Strong drink scrambles sound judgment and the capacity to make responsible decisions. (Leviticus 10:9-11)
- Strong drink weakens spiritual and moral sensitivities. (Isaiah 5:11-12)
- Strong drink can lead to addiction. (Proverbs 23:35)
- Total abstinence from fermented wine was the standard for kings, princes, and judges. (Proverbs 31:4-7)
- Total abstinence was also expected among all who sought the highest level of consecration to God. (Numbers 6:1-5; Judges 13:4-7; 1 Sam. 1:14-15; Prov. 23:31; Jer. 35:2-6)

The cautions about alcohol usage in the New Testament are even more clearly stated:

- Leaders in the church and followers of Christ should certainly not have a lower standard than those who lived before Him.
- Church leaders, whether pastors (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7) or deacons (1 Tim. 3:8) are to be

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<sup>8</sup> Stamps, Donald and J. Wesley Adams, eds. *Full Life Study Bible: An International Study Bible for Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990. pp. 134-135. (NOTE: Donald Stamps was the writer of the accompanying article, “*Wine in New Testament Times*.” The following men served on the editorial committee: Stanley Horton (Assemblies of God), William Menzies (Assemblies of God), Roger Stronstad (Canadian Pentecostal Scholar), French Arrington (Church of God), Robert Shank (Scholar of Evangelical Arminians), Roy Winbush (Church of God in Christ), Richard Waters (IPHC, Former President of Holmes Bible College).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 134-135.

“blameless” in all areas, including alcohol consumption. This strongly implies abstinence as the scriptural standard.

- Believers are called “priests” (1 Peter 2:9) and “kings” (Revelation 1:6) and should certainly follow such prescribed behavior for those distinctions.

Many people see no harm in social drinking. Even numerous preachers are contending that there is nothing wrong with "sipping saints." Quite often they point to examples in history, voices in the medical field, or other cultures to affirm their position. It is one thing to form an argument from those sources, it is another to try to use examples from the Bible as a justification for their choices. We strongly advise against this latter course of action.

There are three passages of Scripture that proponents of social drinking often point to in attempts to justify their behavior. (1) Jesus turning water into wine. (2) Jesus and the Disciples using wine at the Last Supper. (3) The Apostle Paul instructing Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach’s sake. A careful examination of these texts does not support an endorsement for drinking alcoholic beverages in moderation.

(1) Jesus turning water into wine. (John 2:1-11)

The first recorded miracle of Jesus in the Gospels was in Cana of Galilee where He turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). Some contend that the wine Christ produced was fermented. However, it must be observed that if He turned water into alcoholic, fermented wine, that was NOT the greatest miracle that happened that day. The greatest miracle was that not a single person became intoxicated after drinking at that wedding celebration.

How do we know that no one who drank the miraculously produced wine became drunk? All true Christians believe these two things: (1) Jesus was the divine Son of God (John 20:30-31) and (2) drunkenness is a sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). James 1:13 says: "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone." Jesus produced up to 180 gallons of wine that day. (This is over 680 liters!) If He offered an unlimited supply for guests to become drunk, that would be even more than tempting them to such a sin - He would be guilty of "aiding and abetting" the offenders in their crime.

How or why could Jesus do such a thing if He really knew the Law, and the Writings and the Prophets? Jesus knew well Proverbs 20:1 which says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging:

and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." He also knew Habakkuk 2:15, "Woe to him who gives his neighbor drink...to make him drunk." And yet those who contend that Jesus turned water into fermented wine are suggesting that He did exactly that.

Those seeking to justify social drinking by using this text must conclude that Jesus proceeded to function as a bartender, "cutting people off" before they reached the level of intoxication. Yet this idea seems so contrary to the abundance that Jesus always produced for His followers. (For example, when He multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed thousands, there were a dozen bushel baskets left over after everyone had eaten.)

John 2:11 tells us Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana to "show forth His glory." To suggest that He initially manifested His glory to His disciples by producing dozens of gallons of alcoholic wine so the celebrants could get wasted is beyond incredulous. To think He provided only a harmless sip or two for each attendee is equally unbelievable.

As we have seen, there is clear evidence that "wine" ("*oinos*" Greek) may refer to unfermented or fermented drink in the Bible. Also, common sense must not be abandoned. It simply requires too much faith to believe that if Jesus turned water into alcoholic wine, that not a single person became intoxicated. And if even one person would have become drunk as result of something Jesus intentionally did, He certainly could not be the God of the Holy Scriptures.

It is far more plausible to reason that Jesus' first miracle simply speeded up the process that nature annually takes months to achieve and He brought forth the pure, fruit juices of the vine.

## (2) Jesus and the Disciples using wine at the Last Supper.

(Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20)

It is significant to note that none of the gospel writers who recorded the episode in the Upper Room used the word "wine." Instead, they all intentionally said, "fruit of the vine." Fermented wine is not the product of the vine. The only natural "fruit of the vine" is unfermented wine, or the equivalent of what we know as grape juice.

The Lord's Supper was instituted while Jesus and His followers were eating the Passover. During that week, the Law prohibited the presence of *seor*, a word referring to leaven, yeast, or

any agent of fermentation (Exodus 12:9-20; 13:7).<sup>10</sup> Jesus, fully knowing and following the Law would never have used unleavened bread or fermented wine at this event. In the Old Testament, fermented drink was never allowed in the house of God, nor were the priests allowed to come near to the Lord in worship while consuming intoxicating beverages.

In the Bible, fermentation always symbolized corruption and sin (Matt. 16:6, 12). Paul instructed the church at Corinth to put away the fermenting agent of spiritual yeast because Christ is our Passover. A symbol of evil could never be used at one of the most sacred scenes in the life of our Savior. Just as the bread represented the sinless body of Christ and thus had to be unleavened, so the fruit of the vine represented the pure blood of Jesus and had to be unfermented.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the Last Supper provides no approval for alcoholic consumption.

(3) The Apostle Paul instructing Timothy to take a little wine. (1 Timothy 5:23)

This text strongly implies that young Timothy did not usually drink any type of wine used by others in New Testament times. If this had been his regular practice, Paul would not have had to counsel him to take a little wine for medicinal purposes. It is quite possible Timothy had developed stomach pains due to drinking the water in Ephesus. The Apostle instructed him to use a small amount of wine to combat the harmful condition of his body. It should be obvious that Timothy would therefore break his usual custom of abstinence only when needed for medicinal reasons.

Even in this context there is no certainty that Paul had intoxicating wine in mind. For example, one of the most common diagnoses in contemporary medicine for a variety of ailments is for patients to “drink plenty of juices.” There is absolutely no validity in pointing to this passage as a basis for justifying consuming alcoholic beverages for personal gratification.

There is therefore no biblical basis for approving the drinking of alcohol in moderation. The only possible area such proponents can point to is their Christian liberty. Yet the Apostle Paul offered this testimony: “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. I will not be enslaved by anything” (1 Cor. 6:12). And again, “All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 135

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 136

good of his neighbor” (1 Cor. 10:23-24). Thus, for every believer the dominant question must not be, “Can a Christian drink alcohol in moderation?” Instead, the pressing question becomes, “Should a Christian drink alcohol in moderation?”

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

What then is the purpose for this paper? It must be more than a polemic or a reaffirmation of a perspective that now spans over a century. The IPHC position as stated in The Manual is “the what.” This document attempts to explain “the why?” To this inquiring generation we assert that it is *not* legalism, but rather *love* that is the foundation for our stance.

### **I. Love for Ourselves –**

- Jesus taught us to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt. 19:19; 22:39)
- Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- All the members of our bodies are instruments for the Lord to use. (Romans 6:13)

### **II. Love for Our Families –**

- Christians are to first learn to care for their own family. (1 Timothy 5:4)
- Paul began his section on mutual family relationships with an admonition against drunkenness. (Ephesians 5:18-6:9)
- Children are far more likely to follow parent’s examples rather than their advice.
- Children are much more likely to begin to drink alcohol when they see parents doing so.
- Children and wives are far more likely to suffer abuse from an alcoholic father or husband.
- Moderate drinkers may take pride in their abilities to not drink to excess. But what about their children, grandchildren, or friends? If their descendants follow that pattern they may not be as strong and could potentially plunge into alcoholism.

### **III. Love for Other Believers –**

- Paul writes that even if believers do not believe certain things are sinful, they are not to engage in them if they know it will make another Christian stumble and fall.
- “It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.” (Romans 14:21)

- The principle is the same as demonstrated with Paul’s treatment of eating food sacrificed to idols. (1 Corinthians 8)
- Believers must not lead others into what may become destructive behavior for themselves.
- Christians are admonished to place unity and peace in the body of Christ above personal indulgences that they prefer. (Romans 14:19-20; 16:17-18; Ephesians 4:3)
- The IPHC has countless converts who have been gloriously delivered from alcoholism and its effects. We must not give a reason for them to return to their enslaving vice.

#### **IV. Love for Society**

- Christians are called by Jesus to be “salt” & “light” in their communities. (Matt. 5:13-16)
- Believers are instructed to “do good to all people.” (Galatians 6:10)
- Non-believers recognize the lives of Christians that produce good results. (1 Peter 2:12)

According to the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, alcohol abuse is beyond rampant in American society and around the world.<sup>12</sup>

- 26.9 percent of people ages 18 or older reported that they engaged in binge drinking in the past month;
- 14.1 million adults ages 18 and older had an alcohol use disorder (AUD). This includes 9.0 million men and 5.1 million women.
- Only 6.5 percent of adults in the above group having AUD received treatment in the past year.
- An estimated 443,000 adolescents ages 12–17 had AUD, with only 5.2 percent receiving treatment.
- An estimated 88,000 people die from alcohol-related causes annually.
- In 2014, alcohol-impaired driving fatalities accounted for 9,967 deaths (31 percent of overall driving fatalities).
- In 2010, alcohol misuse cost the United States \$249 billion dollars.
- Three-quarters of the total cost of alcohol misuse is related to binge drinking.

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<sup>12</sup> National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. “Alcohol Facts and Statistics.” [www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/alcohol-facts-and-statistics](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/alcohol-facts-and-statistics). November, 2019

- In 2012, 3.3 million deaths, or 5.9 percent of all global deaths were attributable to alcohol consumption.
- Globally, alcohol misuse was the fifth leading risk factor for premature death and disability in 2010.
- More than 10 percent of U.S. children live with a parent with alcohol problems, according to a 2012 study.
- According to the 2017 NSDUH, 30.3 percent of 15-year-olds report that they have had at least 1 drink in their lives
- According to the 2017 NSDUH, approximately 4.5 million people ages 12–20 reported binge drinking in the past month
- According to the 2017 NSDUH, 53.6 percent of full-time college students ages 18–22 drank alcohol in the past month.
- Prevalence of Binge Drinking: According to the 2017 NSDUH, 34.8 percent of college students ages 18–22 reported binge drinking in the past month.
- 1,825 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries, including motor-vehicle crashes.
- 696,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 were assaulted by another student who has been drinking.
- 97,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 report experiencing alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.
- Roughly 20 percent of college students meet the criteria for AUD.
- About 1 in 4 college students report academic consequences from drinking, including missing class, falling behind in class, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall.
- In 2015, of the 78,529 liver disease deaths among individuals ages 12 and older, 47.0 percent involved alcohol.
- Among all cirrhosis deaths in 2013, 47.9 percent were alcohol related.
- In 2009, alcohol-related liver disease was the primary cause of almost 1 in 3 liver transplants in the United States.

- Drinking alcohol increases the risk of cancers of the mouth, esophagus, pharynx, larynx, liver, and breast.

## CONCLUSION

Considering all this evidence there are several questions Christ followers must ask when choosing between abstinence from drinking alcohol or drinking in moderation. These include:

- Does moderate drinking contribute to your spiritual growth and maturity?
- Will moderate drinking adversely affect your Christian witness?
- Does moderate drinking enhance your personal and private life?
- Is moderate drinking worth all the potential risks pointed out in this study?
- Is the expense of moderate drinking a wise appropriation of Christian stewardship?
- What is the motive behind your desire to drink in moderation?
- Should you be asking “Should I drink?” instead of “Can I drink?”

Abstinence is a choice Christians should make, not a commandment that they must keep. What kind of choice is it?

### (1) A Biblical Choice

As we have seen, the Bible is not ambivalent on the destructive, harmful consequences of consuming beverages with high alcoholic content. The scales are tipped heavily on the side of abstinence when it comes to the issue of social drinking in moderation.

### (2) A Wise Choice

Proverbs 20:1 confirms the wisdom of not being led astray by an enticement of strong drink.

- It is impossible to become a drunkard if one abstains from alcoholic beverages.
- We will face our choices at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10)
- We must live in such a way we will not be ashamed at His coming (1 John 2:28)

### (3) A Moral Choice

Choosing abstinence accomplishes many things:

- It glorifies God
- It protects the individual
- It honors other believers
- It preserves families
- It unifies the Church
- It blesses society

Abstinence is not Phariseism, but Christian discipleship. It is based on love, not legalism. Therefore, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church boldly, yet at the same time, lovingly re-affirms its commitment to abstaining from alcoholic beverages.

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