

# To Drink Or Not To Drink?

## *Fresh Start Podcast Transcription*

### ★ Do All For the Glory of God

To drink, or not to drink? That is the question. My theme verse is I Corinthians 10:31. It's the baseline, it's the foundation. *Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* It's not about us. It's about Him. What will bring Him glory. What will allow His life to be expressed in us and through us for His glory. Not stealing from His glory, not calling attention to ourselves, but all for His glory.

There are some super points that I want to weave into this message today. You have the Scriptures that I will be addressing, but I want to share with you the "super points," as I'm calling them, that I'll be weaving into this message. Here they are:

- ★ Do All For the Glory of God
- ★ Prefer Others Always
- ★ Don't Knowingly Cause Anyone to Stumble
- ★ Don't Get Drunk, For Sure
- ★ Count the Cost
- ★ When in Doubt, Don't
- ★ Be Holy Spirit Led, not Policy Driven
- ★ Be Filled with the Spirit, Not Spirits

### ★ Prefer Others Always

Let's take a look at Philippians 2:3-4 *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also the interests of others.* One thing, as I've thought and prayed about this particular subject, I've come to realize (at least my perception, feel free to disagree, maybe you've got a different experience) it seems like our convictions on this particular subject are based a lot on our family culture or our church culture. –Especially our growing up church culture and our growing up family of origin. For example, if a family had a particular standard, we tend to go with those standards. Maybe those standards had been influenced by a lot of heartache and heartbreak. Maybe one or more alcoholics were in the home, in the family and it's like, "Whoa, I don't want to go there, so I've decided I'll never drink because what I went through with [Mom, Dad, or somebody else] was just too painful. How could I ever consume alcohol?" So, then the decision is made to abstain based on that. And then a church could

have rules and regulations and things that may or may not have a Biblical foundation and a lot of what we do and a lot of how we live is cultural. Sometimes it's a Christian culture. For example, I'm sure there are wonderful exceptions, but in the Bible Belt south it tends to be more conservative and a lot of Baptist church and so forth and a lot of times they will have standards, "Don't drink, don't dance, don't chew, don't date girls who do." That kind of thing. We tend to adopt things, from a cultural point of view. But, what I want to take a look at today— Now, think with me, reason with me, but somehow, some way, let's go vertical and tap into God's heart today and His word. I know that will be challenging, because cultural grooving is so deep, but let's open our hearts and maybe God will speak to us in a new way.

Even in my title, my title has kind of a two-edged meaning to it: "To Drink or Not To Drink," in other words, that could be "to drink" as a policy over all. In other words, "I'm going to totally abstain. It doesn't matter what situation I'm in. It doesn't matter, it's already decided, I'm not going to drink. I'm going to totally abstain. That's my policy, that's my conviction, no exceptions." Boom. Big picture, applied to daily living. But then maybe, "to drink or not to drink," "to drink" becomes more of a micro situational decision. It's like, "I don't necessarily have the conviction not to drink; I'm open to be led by the Holy Spirit and in a particular situation I would be free to, on His terms. I would be free to—not getting drunk, of course, He's clear on that. And you may be thinking that He's clear on other things, but stay with me. Maybe it's big picture; big policy. Maybe the policy is flexible, free to, free not to (not getting drunk, of course). But, Lord, what do you want me to do in this situation. So, it could be big picture or small picture. But, regardless, prefer others always.

I can remember part of my upbringing, speaking of cultural, family of origin. My parents were social drinkers. They didn't get drunk, but they were social drinkers. So, it was all part of the social culture that I was raised in. So, I didn't have a bias, so to speak. When I came to the Lord at 24, and got involved initially— Well, we were born and raised in the Episcopal Church, and they actually for communion took real wine. Wine and water mixed together, but it was real wine. We'd go up to the altar and the rector, as they called him (Father Muller was his name, his title) he would have a big chalice, a big cup. Can you imagine drinking from that big cup today? In this day and age of, "I'm going to drink after somebody else?!" Anyway, even though he wiped the cup. It was one at a time. Real wine, mixed with water so it was diluted a little bit, but it was wine. So, that was part of my upbringing. So, I drank alcohol before I came to the Lord. I drank initially after I came to the Lord. A person came up to me one day who was in my Bible study— Because within six months I was leading two Bible studies; I was so on fire, so ignited, so hungry for the word that within 6 months, I was

leading two Bible studies. This was back in 1970 before we stepped into the flow of Trinity in 1977 in Ron Colly High School evening services. Here was my first test: I was at a social gathering and somebody that was in one of my Bible studies came up to me and said (it was a woman) she looked up at me and said, "If you continue to drink," (I had a drink in my hand, a mixed drink in my hand, we were at a social gathering...she was not attacking, she was not unkind) she said, "If you continue to drink, I'm not going to be able to receive from you any more." Boom. There it was. And the Lord posed the question, "Do you want to have influence?" It's not about living for people, but how much influence do you want to have? So, at that point, I quit drinking, cold turkey. –Not that I was drinking a lot, anyway, but I decided to quit drinking. Not because of her, but because of the bigger picture, I wanted to have influence. I wanted it to be a non-issue. I was preferring others. It wasn't like, "Well, free to/free not to. You know, if they've got a problem with it, that's their problem." No, I want to have influence. And I didn't want to lose influence. She was an example that the Lord was giving me: You'll not have influence with her any more if you continue to drink. Do you want to have influence?

### ★ Don't Get Drunk, For Sure

So, let's go to the next Scripture: *Who has woe, who has sorrow, who has contentions, who has complaints, who has wounds without cause, who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine. Those who go in search for mixed wine. Do not look on wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly. At last, it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things and your heart will utter perverse things.* Obviously, this person that's being referred to is drinking too much. So, the super point that applies, I believe, at least that super point of "Don't get drunk, for sure."

And by the way, when I was back in college, I was a wild man before I came to Jesus and I got drunk. I got drunk many times and sometimes I got so drunk, I woke up the next morning not remembering how I got to that place the night before. So, I know what it means to be "black out drunk," back in my college days when I was a wild man, before I came to Jesus, before I surrendered and gave Him the keys to my life.

### ★ Count the Cost

1 Timothy 3: *The sane is trustworthy. If one aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.* Notice in there, "not a drunkard."

Well, when I became an elder, back in 1980-ish with Trinity, before we moved to Phoenix for training in Biblical counseling and then eventually moved back and came on staff in 1982, it was the conviction of Pastor Elmer Murdoch that if we were going to be pastors or elders, we were not to consume alcoholic beverages at all. –At least that was my understanding. So, for all of those years that I was on staff with him at the helm, I honored that. You could say, “Well, how does “counting the cost” apply?” Well, more than one application here. I didn’t have to be an elder, but the understanding was, if you’re going to be an elder, this is part of what it will include. It wasn’t a sacrifice for me, by the way, but for some people it might be. They might have different thoughts or feelings about it. Counting the cost. If you want to have influence. Another application could be, if you want to have influence. If you want to be in a leadership role– all of us can have influence, but if you want to be in a leadership role in a church or an organization or whatever the case may be, how much influence do we want to have? Moving on. Count the cost.

### ★ Be Holy Spirit Led, not Policy Driven

The next one, I Timothy 5:23 *No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach (referring to Timothy) and your frequent infirmities.* So, what’s the super point here? Be Holy Spirit led and not policy-drive. So, here you are in the privacy of your home and let’s say you’re having some chronic stomach issues. I have heard of people that have done this. They’ve taken a little wine for their stomach and it has helped. So, the Bible says it, the Bible speaks to it, the Bible gives freedom for it, it’s not public, it’s private. But, then you could say, well I’ve already decided I’m never going to drink a drop. I’m a total abstainer. Well, see there is your choice. You have the choice. It’s between you and the Lord. So, I hope as we go along today you’re seeing, this is not an outside-in thing. This is between you and the Lord. I’m including these super points to seed your thinking and test your heart and see where your motives really are and see where your relationship really is with the Lord and the ability to hear from Him. So, be Holy Spirit led and not policy driven.

### ★ Don’t Knowingly Cause Anyone to Stumble

Romans 14:21: *It is good neither to eat meat or drink wine, nor to do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.* Well, certainly this Scripture can have the application related to the one that I mentioned earlier. It was going to cause this particular person that was bringing it up to me, it was going to be a stumbling block for her and it was going to hinder her ability to receive from me. So, does that matter? We have to decide, does that matter? It matters to me, by the way. I want to have influence. I’m not trying to keep everybody happy. I realize even as I’m giving this message today, there is a risk to this hot

topic series. I mean, potentially it could be polarizing, because those in our midst today that have decided black and white, hardline, abstain, if you drink a drop you're sinning, you're wrong, and I'm losing respect for you. That could exist in the hearts and minds of some of you here. I pray that will not be the case. I pray that you'll have the Lord's heart on this for you. Not a policy, not a culture. For you. What is He saying to you? So, causing your brother to stumble. I certainly don't want anybody to cause anybody to stumble. Then perhaps another issue could be— Let's project this. Let's say we're in Omaha, Nebraska. Steve and Mindy are going out to celebrate their anniversary. (The next one will be 43, by the way.) And we are in a public place and we've decided to have a glass of wine. (I'm not saying we will, but I'm just giving you a hypothetical, okay?) And somebody who has had a drinking problem sees us and says, "Well, if Pastor Steve and Mindy can drink, then it's probably okay for me then, too!" It's not like I'm taking myself too seriously, but it's like, my history has been I would tend to underestimate my influence. Because I don't think too highly of myself. I don't think too lowly of myself, that's my desire to agree with God about myself, but I surely don't think too highly of myself. So, I'm not assuming that I'm going to have that much influence. But, I suppose I do, by God's grace and mercy. I want to, anyway. I want to have influence. I want to have impact. I'm not presuming on that. I'm not assuming that. But, what I just gave you is a couple of examples that could apply. And certainly it would be totally inappropriate (I'll go more to the extreme) if I know someone who's had a drinking problem and we're going out for dinner, am I going to drink in front of somebody that I know has had a problem with alcohol? Am I preferring them if I do? Am I potentially causing them to stumble if I do? How that would speak to me is I couldn't do that. For those reasons. I must prefer them and I don't want them to stumble.

### ★ Count the Cost

Luke 7:33-34. This is very interesting. They're all interesting, of course, but this one I found very interesting. *For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine and you say he has a demon. The Son of Man has come eating and drinking and you say, Look! A glutton and a winebibber! A friend of tax collectors and sinners!* So, what's the point here? Well, certainly "count the cost" applies. But, why? People are going to think what they want to think, by the way. Isn't that interesting? John the Baptist totally abstained. Jesus partook of some wine (He didn't get drunk, obviously) but they were both unrighteously judged. Isn't that interesting? The one who abstained, they said he has a demon. The one who partook a little bit and hung out with sinners (grace and truth approach, building bridges of grace over which the truth can travel.) You know the many stories. The woman caught in adultery, the law said she could have been stoned and killed but He took a different approach. "He that is without

sin cast the first stone.” They dropped their stones. “Woman where are your accusers? Neither do I accuse you. Go and sin no more.” He didn’t bring the truth in until the very end. He built the bridge of grace over which the truth could travel. So, He didn’t compromise. So, the fact that he even gave the time of day to the Samaritan woman, some would struggle with. The woman at the well. The fact that He would even talk to some of the people that I’ve mentioned. The sinful woman that came and showed up uninvited to the home of Simon the Pharisee, the one who broke the alabaster box and was bathing and washing His feet with her tears and expensive perfume and her hair. So, He was known for hanging out with, spending time with sinners. From the vantage point of the religious. So, there’s going to be a cost. No matter what you decide, there will be a cost. That’s another factor if you decide to totally abstain, no exceptions. Some will judge you unrighteously about that. They’ll decide, “Oh, they’re just [this, that or whatever].” So, have an audience of One perspective. If you’re looking at an audience of One, that’s a non-issue. You probably aren’t going to have influence with some of those people. Does that matter? If you don’t want to do...you could never do enough to satisfy all, so that’s a black hole. So, audience of One. That’s what I keep coming back to. “Lord, not culture. What do You want? Your word speaks to both sides of this, seemingly.” That’s a healthy thing, you know. You’ve got to wrestle with this. You’ve got to decide. It’s going to cost you something, no matter what you decide. Isn’t that how our faith should be, by the way? Being willing to be of no reputation, if that applies.

### ★ Do All For the Glory of God

John 2:7-10: *Jesus said to them, fill the water pots with water [this is the wedding in Galilee] and fill them up to the brim. Draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast. And the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine and he did not know where it came from. But the servants who had drawn the water knew. The master of the feast called the bridegroom and he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out good wine and when the guests have well drunk then he sets out the inferior. But you have kept the good wine until now.”* This was the first recorded miracle of Jesus and I believe even He Himself represents the new wine. Do all for the glory of God. I think that’s just another reminder to us to do all to the glory of God. Whatever we do, do all to the glory of God.

Proverbs 31:4-7 *It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink. Lest they drink and forget the law and pervert the justice of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing and wine to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his misery no more.* Again, count the cost. Now, when I was a new

believer, another believer brought this Scripture up to me because at that particular time I was new in the faith and I think it was before the woman I mentioned earlier had approached me and said, "If you keep drinking at all, any, I'm not going to be able to come to your Bible study any more and I'm not going to be able to receive from you." So, I think it was about the same time, she said that and another Christian quoted that. Because we were having a discussion about it and I was saying, "Well I think it's okay, you know, free to/free not to, as long as you don't get drunk. And then he brought up this Scripture (I'm just reporting what he said) and he said, you know, because we are royalty—He's speaking of a king here, but we are royalty, we're King's kids—this applies to us too." So, I thought, okay. At that particular time, I knew God was speaking to me, "Pull the plug on this. Don't drink." And that's the decision I made.

Interestingly enough, though, we were at Marcio's Italian Cafe back in the '70s. We were with Mindy's parents, Mindy's mom was still alive, she died in 1982. My parents were there. Marcio's has since burned down, but we used to go there with the Petersons. So, the server was taking our drink order and it came to me (I had already decided I wasn't going to drink anymore) and my dad was sitting next to me. I ordered a Coke or an iced tea and my dad turned to me and he said, "You're not going to get a drink?" My dad wasn't pushing anything, I was surprised he even noticed. I said, "I'm not trying to project this on you, I just decided I'm not going to drink any more. I just want to have more influence." I could tell that really bothered him that I had taken that stand and made that decision. I don't remember all of what he said, but the theme of his nonverbal and his verbal was this: "Don't take this Christianity too far." That was the theme.

Now, years later, we were still holding true to what Pastor Murdoch had required of pastors and elders, which had become a non-issue, I didn't even think about it. So, we weren't drinking at all. We had gone on a family vacation to Panama City Beach and we met some Bible Belt Christians. I don't know if they were really all-in with Jesus, but it was cultural. And we were talking about drink and we were probably hanging out around the pool and they were probably drinking a beer or a glass of wine or something and somehow the subject came up and this gal, if you can imagine this older lady, I say this respectfully with a southern drawl (that tends to be the case with people that live in the south) she said, "Now don't get too good, Honey!" I thought, "interesting."

So, one thought that I've had as I've been listening to what Link and Luke have been saying in this hot topic series, I wanted you to know, I wanted this to include some disclosure, with

wisdom and discretion of course, in terms of what have I decided. Not just what I've decided in the past, but where am I now? You have to decide that I want this message to include some disclosure of what I believe and what my position is. You don't have to agree with me, and I hope you don't lose respect for me if you don't agree with me because I want to have influence. Let me give you an example.

If you can imagine the example that I gave with Pastor Murdoch and after he retired, we weren't thinking, "Oh, good! He's retired! We can have a glass of wine now." (laughter) That didn't happen. You see, I was so groomed in the norm of not drinking, it was a non-issue. I didn't even have a desire for it. So, from '97 until 2002, in May, before Justin and Kir (our oldest) got married, we went down to Charleston, South Carolina. Kiawah Island was the area. We were at Carolina's restaurant and we were meeting Justin's new bride to be, Kirsten/Kir and her father. Her mother, Mary, had died of cancer not that much prior to— it hadn't been that long since she had passed away. A couple of years at the most, maybe even a year. What I'm getting at is, Lawrence loves his wine. Every night for dinner he has a glass of wine. That's what he does. He's a little older than we are. He's probably close to 70. Lives in Pittsburgh. He's the owner of American Roller Bearing, Very successful business man, but you would never know that he is so wealthy because he is so down to earth and just a great guy. So engaging, so wonderful. We were sitting there in Carolina's Restaurant, a beautiful restaurant, and the purpose of it was to meet Lawrence and especially meet our daughter in law to be (they subsequently got married the following October). I turned to Mindy and I said, "I think we should have a glass of wine." She about fell off her seat (laughter) because it had been twenty years, or more, actually. I say twenty because in 1982 I went on staff at Trinity and here we are in 2002, twenty years later. So, it had probably been over twenty years but it had been at least twenty. She looked at me in shock and she said, "Are you sure?" I said, "I feel free." I'm not trying to impress Lawrence, he probably wouldn't care one way or another, whether we have a glass of wine or not, but I just want to join Him in the fellowship of something that he enjoys. Something that he loves. We're not going to get drunk, obviously. We're going to have a glass of wine. So, we [conferred] a little bit and we decided yes and when we ordered a glass of wine, Justin was the second one that almost fell off the seat. (laughter) Because he had never seen us drink a drop. So, it was a historic day in that regard. (laughter) So, we did.

So, we were not in Omaha. We were with family. It was public, but really private in that sense, none of you were there. We weren't hiding; we're not hypocrites. But we exercised freedom and I believe it was freedom without compromise. So, that was an application that



we made. So, I believe, my conviction is: who are you with, where are you located, obviously getting drunk is not an issue, but within these considerations, you know. Who are you with? Could be a non-option. You know, if there had been anybody at the table in that setting, back in 2002, if there would have been anybody at the table that I would have known had any kind of conviction about this, it would be a non-issue. Why? Prefer them. Not want them to stumble. Live for the glory of God, for the benefit of others. It's not worth it. It's not an entitlement. It's not a right. And, if I can say it this way, it shouldn't even be an issue if we put it under the heading of "Do all for the glory of God." Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit. That's what I want. I don't want anything to cloud my mind. I don't want anything to affect my decisions or judgment. I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, not any other spirits, and have Him have His way.

### ★ When in Doubt, Don't

I will conclude with this. When in doubt, don't. Notice in the Amplified version, *Let the peace of God rule in your heart and let the peace (the soul harmony which comes from Christ) rule and act umpire continually in your hearts. Deciding and setting with finality all questions that arise in your minds, in that peaceful state to which as members of Christ's one body you were also called to live and be thankful, appreciative, giving praise to God always.* Let the peace of God rule. When in doubt, there you go, don't.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this time. All of these subjects are important, Lord. It's so important for more than one reason. We certainly want to have Your will for us in our lives and how we live. But, Lord, I think this series is also important that we want to have influence in our city. We want to have influence in the nations and we want to be more equipped to build bridges of grace over which the truth can travel. We want each and every one to be true to their convictions and go vertical and live for the glory of God and benefit of others and everybody has a choice. I pray that our choices, day to day, week after week, will not be culturally driven or policy driven, but Holy Spirit led and we'll really have Your mind and heart. I really believe, Lord, that's how You live here on planet Earth. Not a compromise. I believe You, in Your humanity, were so in tuned with Your Father. You did His bidding. And as we do the same, we might be surprised sometimes (laughter) and have a "Charleston, South Carolina" experience. Even then, though, if anybody found out about that, it could cost us something. But, we're not minimizing that, Lord. It may not cost us something with the people we're with, but it may cost us something with the people we're not with. So, does that matter? Yes. So, Lord as we wrestle, as we pray, as we obey, I pray we are more motivated than ever to cultivate an intimate relationship with you that is so filled with grace and truth,

hope and forgiveness, so filled with compassion, so filled with wisdom, that we can navigate these situations in ways that are amazing to us and amazing to the people around us and to You be the glory, Lord. To drink or not to drink, that is the question for today's message. And it may be the question that faces us even yet today or this week. But Lord I pray that what I've shared today will be a help and an encouragement to really press into You and get Your mind and heart and then just simply live for Your glory and for the benefit of others. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.

I have one more thing to read that I forgot. Link mentioned this a couple of weeks ago, it's called, "Others May, You Cannot."

*If God has called you to be really like Jesus in all your spirit, He will draw you into a life of crucifixion and humility, and put on you such demands of obedience, that He will not allow you to follow other Christians, and in many ways He will seem to let other good people do things which He will not let you do.*

*Other Christians and ministers who seem very religious and useful may push themselves, pull wires, and work schemes to carry out their plans, but you cannot do it; and if you attempt it, you will meet with such failure and rebuke from the Lord as to make you sorely penitent.*

*Others may brag on themselves, on their work, on their success, on their writings, but the Holy Spirit will not allow you to do any such thing, and if you begin it, he will lead you into some deep mortification that will make you despise yourself and all your good works.*

*Others will be allowed to succeed in making money, or having a legacy left to them, or in having luxuries. But it is likely God will keep you poor, because He wants you to have something better than gold, and this is a helpless dependence on Him, that He may have the privilege of supplying your needs day by day out of an unseen treasury.*

*The Lord will let others be honoured, and put forward, and keep you hid away in obscurity, because He wants to produce some choice, fragrant fruit for His coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade.*

*He will let others be great, but keep you small. He will let others do a work for Him, and get the credit for it, but He will make you work and toil on without knowing how much you are doing: and then to make your work still more precious, He will let others get the credit for the work you have done, and this will make your reward ten times greater when Jesus comes.*

*The Holy Spirit will put a strict watch over you, with a jealous love, and will rebuke you for little words and feelings or for wasting your time, which other Christians never seem distressed over. So make up your mind that God is an infinite Sovereign God, and has a right to do as He pleases with His own, and He will not explain to you a thousand things which may puzzle your reason in His dealings with you.*

*He will take you at your word; and if you absolutely sell yourself to be His slave, He will wrap you up in a jealous love, and let other people say and do many things that you cannot do or say. Settle it forever, that you are to deal directly with the Holy Spirit, and that He is to have the privilege of tying your tongue, or chaining your hand, or closing your eyes. In ways that He does not deal with others. Now when you are so possessed with the living God that you are, in your secret heart, pleased and delighted over this peculiar, personal, private, jealous guardianship and management of the Holy Spirit over your life, you will have found the vestibule of Heaven.”-George Douglas Watson, 1845 – 1924*

God bless you.