

Appendix E

**An Idea You Won't Find
in Most Books About Evangelism**



The contents of Appendix E is intended to be a mature discussion on an often controversial topic: the potential role of drinking in moderation when interacting with nonbelievers in social situations where alcohol is present and is not being abused. This discussion encourages using Scripture as a guide to judicious decisions, made with discernment and emphasizing self-control when drinking alcohol. If you are looking for a biblical text as an excuse to over-indulge when drinking alcohol, read no further. The following discussion is not intended to provide one.

Scripture instructs us to guard against excesses, but drinking in moderation is not prohibited. Drinking alcohol may be a sin for some people and it is definitely sinful for those who abuse it, but for others who drink in moderation and responsibly, it is not necessarily a sin. Why am I bringing this up? Because it is a scenario that has happened to my husband, Phil, and me on multiple occasions, and we have had to seek an answer to this question for ourselves:

Scenario 1

You stop by a neighbor's house on a Saturday afternoon to admire the car he is working on and ask if he needs any help. He says no, but it's obvious he's glad for a chance to socialize. He pulls a beer out of the cooler and offers it to you. *What do you do?*

Scenario 2

You and your spouse have been cultivating a relationship with the couple down the street who also have kids the same age as yours. You all decide to have a parents' night out at the local Chili's. After everyone is seated, the other couple orders a round of beer for everyone. *What do you do?*

Scenario 3

Your neighbor is drunk—again. He comes over to chat while you are doing yard work and it is obvious that he is slurring his words. He offers you a beer. *What do you do?*

What is really important here is that we are not talking about the behavior of a nominal Christian (one that simply warms a pew occasionally), but the behavior of a person that is truly committed to Christ, and his lifestyle and attitude towards others are a reflection of that commitment. Every situation must be considered on its own merit, by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you in your actions. The Apostle Paul explains his use of the freedom he has in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. In verse 22 he writes, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” If we want to reach the people around us, we will be dealing with a constant tension of secular values and biblical values. Because the people you are desiring to reach are still under the law and have no concept of the freedom and joy to be found in Christ, they have a different perception as to what it means to be a Christian and often imagine that Christianity is simply a bunch of oppressive rules that must be followed and that you can’t have any “fun” anymore. On the other hand, abusive behavior in any form is a sin and not to be condoned. The proper response in all three scenarios is that of Christian love, but the specifics are very different. Not only must one consider the effect on your audience, but also the effect on you personally. If you have struggled with alcohol addiction in the past, your response would (and should) be very different from someone who enjoys a drink occasionally and has always enjoyed alcohol in moderation.

The reason I am bringing this up is that I have never seen it addressed in an evangelism book, yet it is a typical scenario in daily American life unless one is ensconced in a Christian bubble which prevents any opportunity to witness at all. And if we are completely honest with ourselves, while many Christians choose abstinence, many other Christians enjoy a glass of wine with dinner on occasion. I think we need to tackle these uncomfortable topics so that together we can seek Scriptural guidance and wisdom from other mature Christians as we seek to reach the people in our Jerusalem. When Jesus was teaching the crowds about John the Baptist and spoke of this generation, He said in Matthew 11:18-19, “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.”’ But wisdom is proved right by her actions.”

Matthew 11:18-19 suggests that Jesus, in befriending the lost, was being associated with their sinful habits. Gluttony is eating to excess which may be regarded as sinful, as is being a drunkard, but the context suggests that these were insults hurled at Jesus without a close look at what had actually occurred. I can well imagine Jesus ministering to sinners while attending their dinner or party and sipping on a goblet of wine or nibbling on some snacks in the vicinity of heavier drinking and eating. But the

important point (wisdom) is that He made His presence known—he hung out with them rather than condemning them, so that by His witness He was a light that they could see. Are we so afraid of being viewed by our Christian peers as unrighteous that we won't allow ourselves to be a light in the dark by being accessible to those who need our Savior as much as we do?

In Mark 2:15-16, we learn about the ministry of Jesus and who He hung out with:

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

If we follow the example of our Lord, we meet people where they are. Perhaps for some people, that may be over a beer occasionally, and if done with wisdom and discernment, it may just open an opportunity that would have been lost by a Pharisee ... Jesus made Himself accessible to everyone and if we do the same, then we share His heart for the lost.

Closing thoughts...

If you choose not to drink (regardless of the reason) or if your audience has obviously already indulged excessively so having a drink is not even an option to consider, your response needs to be tempered so that it is not judgmental and does not shut down a relationship that has not yet had a chance to begin. If you think having a drink may be appropriate under the circumstances (Consider Scenarios 1 and 2), there are other things to consider including who else is present (Are there children or teens observing your behavior which could send an inappropriate message? Will your actions create a stumbling block rather than opening a door? Will there be an appropriate amount of time between consuming an alcoholic beverage and driving?). Regardless of your position, we must remember that each of us have sins and behaviors that we struggle with and it is through the process of sanctification that we gain victory over our struggles; but this can't happen if our audience rejects the Gospel because they reject the Gospel-bringer who judges them without loving them first. This does not necessarily mean having a drink together, but it does mean being careful not to project an attitude of condemnation when offered one. If you do not drink, or if you feel led not to accept their offer of an alcoholic beverage, "Hey, I don't really drink – but do you have a Coke? That would be great!" conveys your desire to socialize with them while allowing them to be comfortable and as a result, receptive to your offer of friendship.