

# What the Bible Says about Drugs & Alcohol



*Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*(Galatians 5:19-21)*

The first truth that must be established is that substance abuse is a violation of the law of God. As one counselee confessed, “I was never able to overcome my substance abuse until I admitted it was my sin against God.” Recognition of the sin is the first step; the next step is repentance. In the Biblical book of Revelation, God’s final assessment of the world is that it did not repent of its “sorceries.”

*“And they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.”*

*(Revelation 9:21)*

The biblical Greek word for “sorceries” is φάρμακον (*pharmakon*) from which we get the English word “pharmacy.” Sorcerers were the drug dealers of the ancient world. In the end, the world chooses drugs over God to fill the void in the human heart. Although this is the general direction of the world, this does not have to be your end.

*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*

*(2 Peter 3:9)*

God could have made a world in which no substances produce intoxication – a world with no marijuana, no alcohol, and no cocaine. But God allowed these elements to expose our inner rebellion against God. In the same way, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was put in the garden to test the hearts of Adam and Eve. Substance abuse shows that something has gone terribly wrong in the human heart. The problem is not the substance; the problem is evil within the human heart. God never wanted people to cloud their thinking with poisons.

Substance abuse is intrinsically evil because it leads men away from reality and sound judgment. It destroys what remains of the image of God in man and, thus, threatens to blind and distract men from God’s salvation.

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation (wastefulness), but be filled with the Spirit.*

*(Ephesians 5:18)*

*Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.*

*(Proverbs 20:1)*

**Beware of blame shifting.** Sigmund Freud, the father of modern secular psychology, took this approach. He reasoned that if we did not have a Victorian, Puritanical conscience, we would not feel guilt over our sin. If we did not have guilt, we would never try to hide our guilt through substance

abuse or other coping mechanisms. So rather than blame self, he blamed the conscience, society and family upbringing. People are not truly helped through this approach. Those who have been under extensive secular drug and alcohol counseling are often resistant to Biblical counseling because they have learned all sorts of psychological models that excuse their sin.

## THE CAUSE

The standard definition of addiction is dependence on a substance to provide a temporary sense of well-being. Alcohol and drugs are a way to alleviate emotional pain and anxiety due to past memories, present problems, or future fears.

In C.S. Lewis’ allegory, *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, the witch entices the main character with these words,

*I am not trying to make you believe that this cup will take you to your paradise. I am not saying it will quench your thirst for long. But taste it, none the less, for you are very thirsty... have one more taste of it, before you abandon it forever... what other pleasure is there in sight?*

For what are people thirsting? Why do people love the experience of a high or drunkenness? There are deeper psychological/spiritual motivations behind all of this, and knowing why people engage in certain behaviors is part of finding the solution.

The Bible teaches that all sin is motivated by three desires: (1) lust of the flesh, (2) lust of the eyes, and (3) pride of life. These three loves are the driving force behind all substance addictions.

*Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is*

*passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

*(1 John 2:15-17)*

## 1. The Lust of the Flesh

Drugs and alcohol affect brain chemistry, producing certain moods. Because of our fallen moral condition, people base their lives on their feelings rather than on deeper spiritual values. As the Bible teaches, men are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Timothy 3:4).” This is the religion of Hedonism, the worship of pleasure. There is great selfishness in this behavior. Rather than living and working for God and others, the substance abuser cares only about his own pleasure and escape. Even though the substance abuser knows he is destroying himself, the euphoria of drugs is more important to him than the body God has given him. The addict, or even the recreational drug user, must begin to say to himself, “It is not right for me to pursue such selfish, destructive pleasures.”

## 2. The Lust of the Eyes

This is the desire to have possessions or, rather, to have more than what God has provided. The “lust of the eyes” is prohibited in the tenth commandment, “Thou shalt not covet.” While “the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:10),” the evil of substance abuse is only minimally driven by a desire for possessions. However, a few turn to drugs and alcohol because they are unhappy with their financial lot in life.

## 3. The Pride of Life

This is the desire for importance, significance, popularity, or attention. God desires people to have purpose, but not through self-aggrandizing pride.

Because people harbor the sinful “pride of life” they will turn to alcohol and drugs to hide from any reality that they are “losers”. If you live in a stupor, you don’t have to deal with your own

failure. People have guilt over sin, failed relationships, missed opportunities, or laziness. They are often reaping what they have sown, and they wish it were not so.

Substance abuse is a way to alleviate low self-esteem by hiding in the stupor and euphoria of drugs and alcohol. An addict has an inexplicable craving for the effects of drugs and alcohol because, on a subconscious level, he is trying to avoid unpleasant feelings, situations, and responsibilities. One counselee admitted, “Alcohol made me feel better about myself than anyone else possibly could.” But the more one hides in substance abuse, the more problems arise and, hence, the greater need to hide. It is a downward cycle.

Since we all have the “pride of life”, anyone can fall into substance abuse; but certain personality types are more prone. Those who are hostile, resentful, jealous, lazy, irresponsible, self-centered, or self-absorbed tend to have a greater desire to cover up their inadequacies. This assessment may sound harsh, but no one is ever helped out of drugs and alcohol until he takes responsibility for his sin. Pride is a terrible sin that drives people to do all sorts of evil.

Some substance abusers certainly have feelings of unworthiness and self-hate because they have been raised in abusive situations. Such people need truth and comfort. But even these victims must recognize that they are also tainted with sin. Because of the “pride of life”, they have reacted wrongly to the abuse of others by turning to drugs and alcohol.

A common therapy is to help the substance abuser “believe in himself” or “think better about himself.” But thinking “I am not such a bad guy” or “I am just as good as the other guy” is not always the truth. Such counsel serves only to replace wounded pride with more pride. God’s solution is to:

- (1) confess one’s sin and failure;
- (2) decide to live by God’s mercy and grace; and

(3) decide to live in humble obedience to God regardless of your status in the world.

The man who is saved is the one who cries out “**God be merciful to me the sinner (Luke 18:13).**”

## THE CURE

As we have seen, the motive behind substance abuse is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The apostle John calls these loves the “love of the world” because these loves are so much a part of “the world”. 1 John 2:15 states, “*Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*”

Here is the root of our problem. We love the enticements of the world more than we love God. Why? It would be nice to say that it is due to our ignorance, but that is not the full reason. Instead of loving God first, we love our sinful passions and our independence from God. This is man’s fallen condition. “*Men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil (John 3:19).*”

The Biblical warning is that time is running out. There is no future in sinful affections, but the one who loves and obeys God will live forever.

*The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:17)*

**The cure for substance abuse is to replace your love for drugs and alcohol with a love for God. Fill the emptiness in your soul with God.**

Is it possible for a man to change what he loves? Yes, but only through the supernatural help of God. This is the core message of the Bible – there is a God who can deliver you from the power of sin.

All God asks from you is faith. Faith is a moral decision of your will to make Jesus Christ both Lord and Savior. It is a belief that Jesus Christ is God incarnate and that He paid the judicial price for our sin on the cross. Other resources are available to explain further the details of God’s plan of salvation, but the basic point being made here is that the addict must make a moral decision for God. This means belief, confession, repentance, and commitment to God. The decision must be sincere!

A counselee once responded, “I want to get over my cocaine addiction, but I am not interested in God and religion.” There is little hope for this man. Others might be more careful in their words by saying, “I am interested in a little bit of religion if there is something better in it for me.” This also sounds insufficient because the motive is still about self rather than God. Jesus taught that salvation can only come by a radical submission to God. Jesus taught that to gain one’s life, one must give his life to God.

*And He (Jesus) was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.” (Luke 9:23-24)*

Here is where many fall short of the genuine deliverance. Non-religious counselors often appeal to the earthly benefits of staying sober – you can have a job, self-respect, and a loving family. You can take pride in being able to say, “I was able to beat drugs and alcohol.” Certainly some people can overcome addictions without God’s help. Personal gain and self-preservation are powerful motivators. Even the devil himself doesn’t want to be destroyed. But that motivation alone does not save the soul. What good is sobriety if you lose your soul in Hell? The real cure is surrendering one’s life fully to God.

*For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? (Luke 9:25)*

## WHAT NEXT?

Many of those who bow the knee to God stop abusing drug and alcohol immediately because the core reason for substance abuse is removed.

- ♦ Guilt is removed through Christ’s forgiveness.
- ♦ There is purpose for living.
- ♦ Low self-esteem is gone because the quality of life is not judged by earthly success.

Others still struggle because they continue to be deceived by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The soul is made new through the power of Christ, but the old mind holds on to the lies. They retain the wrong way of viewing God, themselves, and the world. It will take more Christian education to help them overcome old attitudes.

All who have given their lives to God must and will continue in Bible study, Christian fellowship, prayer, and church attendance. These are the tools God has given us to have victory over sinful temptations.

*And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:32)*

B.E. Winship

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\* HarborBible.com (732) 583-9286  
\* Email: HarborBible@verizon.net