

*Opening comments and arguments overheard in a Youth Ministries class at imaginary Quest Bible College*

**Dr. Quest** (on the history of alcohol and intoxication)

Let's go back to the beginning. When did substance abuse start? Well, we don't know for sure, but perhaps it only started after the flood since drunkenness is never mentioned before Gen. 9:21. Some scholars believe that fermentation did not even exist earlier, since the world was very different before the flood. If grape juice had easily become alcoholic earlier, wouldn't drunkenness have been clearly mentioned along with violence in Gen. 6:11-12 and wouldn't Noah have been more careful (Gen. 9:20-21)?

The world was changed greatly and perhaps along with it the fruit of the vine was as well. Did it only become red, sparkling, and addictive as described in Prov. 23:29-35 after the flood? Maybe. Regardless, Prov. 23:29-35 is the most detailed passage in the Bible on the effects of excess wine on the human body. What do you think of this well-known passage?



**Red** (on Proverbs 23:29-35 as literature)

I was impressed by how well these seven verses fit together. They are all obviously on the same subject which is often not the case in Proverbs. Moreover, the chain of rhetorical questions in verse 29 and the seasickness analogy in verse 34 are thought-provoking yet easy to understand. So too is the poetic contrast drawn between the initial beauty of the wine in the cup (23:31) and the poisonous, snake-bite-like aftereffects (23:32). For sure, the subject matter is ugly, but these verses are still beautiful Hebrew literature!

**Frank** (on the need to show the consequences of addiction)

Beautiful literature? Really? To me, Prov. 23:29-35 is like a man taking a somewhat rebellious teenage son to the inner city to observe the miserable state of homeless alcoholics and drug users. So frankly, I think the passage is intended to be shocking and anything but beautiful. "Listen to what I'm telling you about drinking and drug use, son, or you may end up like this!" The bottom line point in verse 35 seems to be about how addictive wine can be.

**Socie** (on the social nature of drinking)

Of course, one drink leads to another, but that is in part because one drunkard leads to another as well. The man in 23:29-35 was NOT drinking all by himself. After he and his companions got drunk together, they apparently beat him up (23:35). THEY were a BIG part of his problem. Didn't anyone notice the parental warning in 23:19-21 against befriending those who love to drink? So shouldn't we focus on the social interaction involved and 23:20 instead of just the wine itself and 23:29-35?

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**Rocky** (a question about 1 Tim. 5:23)

Hey, wait a minute! Didn't Paul tell Timothy to drink wine for his stomach's sake (1 Tim. 5:23)?

**Dr. Quest** (on water, wine, and 'strong drink')

Good question, Rocky. Paul told Timothy to **use a little wine** for his stomach's sake. Apparently Timothy did not want to drink wine at all because of the moral dangers involved (Prov. 20:1), but the water that was available back then, especially when traveling, was often impure. So adding some wine to it, helped purify it and make it safer to drink. Likewise, adding water to wine made it less intoxicating. The beautiful red wine in Prov. 23:31 was probably totally undiluted "strong drink." Such could be used as a pain killer for someone who was dying (Prov. 31:6), but otherwise it was to be avoided, especially by those who had important decisions to make (Prov. 31:4-5). — Now, let's get back to our main passage. What other thoughts do you have about Prov. 23:29-35?

**Red** (on 23:27-28 being comparatively short)

Again, I am impressed by how long this string of verses is. There are seven verses in a row about the consequences of drinking too much, but there are just two verses here, in 23:27-28, describing what a harlot is like. I suspect this is because there is much about harlots and adultery earlier, in chapters five through nine, but I wonder if the order is significant.

## S size & shape

How many verses should be studied? What's the structure?

### SEVEN VERSES OR MORE?

Verses 23:29-35 are all on the same subject, the negative effect of wine on the body and mind. These seven verses clearly should be studied together.

The key question regarding the scope of the study is on whether 23:19-21 should be included as well. If it is, it will be more clear that the chapter is primarily for young men. If only 23:29-35 is studied, the physical effects of alcohol is more clearly the main topic.

Also see Prov. 20:1, 31:1-7, Luke 10:34, and 1 Tim. 5:23.

### CIRCULAR?

The "wounds without cause" in the Prov. 23:29 corresponds to being struck and beaten without knowing it in 23:35. The closing point in 23:35, however, is about addiction.

#### notes

## E earthly (sinful) things

What human weakness or sinfulness is seen in the text?

### SUPERFICIAL ATTRACTIONS

People are naturally attracted to that which looks good in a superficial way. This explains why Solomon commanded his son to not look at the red, sparkling, and swirling wine (23:31).

Earlier in chapter 23, Solomon addressed the problematic way that humans, especially the young, are attracted to and impacted by bad companions (23:19-21).

### CONSEQUENCES IGNORED

The dangerous consequences of excess drink (23:29-35) are well known, but it is human nature to ignore such for shortterm pleasure or satisfaction (23:35). Yet, Solomon still used rhetorical questions (23:29) and powerful analogies (23:32, 34) to appeal to human reason. In this life, some sin can be overcome through reason.

#### notes

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### Edeline (on Proverbs as home schooling)

I was homeschooled from kindergarten through high school. So to me the flexible content in Proverbs is a bit like home school curriculums. Day by day, homeschool moms see problems and weaknesses and focus on whatever they are. Most homeschooling parents desperately want their kids to be like themselves BUT without their moral failures.

See what Solomon said in 23:26! His mother also warned about women and drink in 31:1-7, with women mentioned first just like in 23:26-35. So I think it's obvious that the order is significant.

### Theo (on God not being mentioned in 23:19-35)

It is easy to see the parental concern here, but where is God? Theologians almost never quote this chapter or much of anything in Proverbs for that matter. There is plenty in chapter 23 about sin, but not much at all about God himself.

### Dr. Quest (on the connection between parents and God)

Theo, is it wise to differentiate sharply between God and his will on one hand and the desire of godly parents on the other? Doesn't a child who gives joy to his or her parents (23:25) by living right also please God? Likewise, isn't the prohibition against looking with desire at the red wine in verse 31 from God. The Lord himself does not want you to be an alcoholic!

## E the Eternal One

How is the text connection with the Giver of life?

### BASIC POINT #1

'Natural results' are actually the consequences of trying to live by, or without taking God's design seriously, since nature was designed by the Creator.

### BASIC POINT #2

Ordinary people can make the same basic observations as King Solomon in Prov. 23:29-35. So these verses do not seem at first to be special. However, they are inspired and have God's authority behind them. So the prohibition in verse 31 is more than just good advice from an ancient but long-dead king.

### BASIC POINT #3

In Proverbs, the desire of godly parents represent the desire and will of God himself.

notes

## D doing

What should we do and / or not do?

### THINK.

The rhetorical questions in 23:29 and the answer in 23:30 are designed to help us think seriously about the various negative consequences of drinking.

### WATCH YOUR DESIRES.

The negative command to not look upon the red and sparkling wine in 23:31 means to not desire it and to be careful about being attracted by its outward beauty. Youth should have their eyes on God and godly, parental examples instead (23:26, 24:1).

### TEACH PROACTIVELY IN THE HOME AGAINST SIN.

In light of verses like 22:6, we should be confident that our efforts to keep children and youth from sin will be blessed by God with success.

notes

**Evan** (on the need for evangelism)

As an evangelism major, it pains me to hear so much about outward morality based on Prov. 23:29-35, without the gospel or the Savior ever being mentioned. King Solomon seemed to be mostly concerned about outward behavior. [See, for instance, 23:28.] Shouldn't we be telling youth to look to the Lord Jesus instead of telling them to not look at strong drink?

**Edeline** (on the need for proactive teaching)

To appreciate Proverbs, I think we need to think like homeschooling moms and dads rather than youth evangelists. There is more to homeschooling and discipling children than preaching John 3:16 every day. Much of what needs to be taught to kids who are still at home is preventative just like in today's passage. Who's right, Dr. Quest, Evan or I?

**Dr. Quest** (on evangelism AND teaching)

"Who's right?" What a question! I appreciate Evan's desire to evangelize those who are like the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15, but I agree with Edeline that most of those in the Proverbs target audience were younger and still at home. They needed to be forewarned about the addictive nature of wine, and that seems to be the bottom line in today's passage.

Even so, it may be helpful to think about the prodigal son and evangelism as well. The prodigal was involved with prostitutes for sure and also probably loved strong drink. So if you were speaking on Prov. 23:26-35, Evan, would you talk about the prodigal as well?

*Does Proverbs 23:29-35  
call for  
proactive moral teaching  
or  
evangelism of the fallen?*

**Evan** (on speaking about the prodigal)

Yes! The prodigal is the best New Testament example of the behavior that Solomon described in Prov. 23:26-35. So I would connect the passage with the New Testament and the gospel.

**Dr. Quest** (on what we should Do — S.E.E.D. step #4)

Ok, and in addition, it may be good to point out that the prodigal did not repent until **after** he ran out of money and was thereby cut off from his former sinful way of life. In line with this, Christian rehabilitation programs endeavor to isolate those they are working with from their previous situations so that they can begin to think and act differently.

That said, it is still true that Proverbs 23:29-35 is proactive teaching aimed at keeping youth from becoming involved with alcohol. Therefore Edeline is right in saying that it is homeschool like. If children are raised properly, in the fear of the Lord, they normally will not depart from the right way when they get older. See 22:6 and 23:17-18. What then should we do?

Evan wants to evangelize the lost. Proverbs 23:27 and 23:35 by themselves do not give much hope that such efforts will succeed, since the grip of sin is so powerful. However, the story of the prodigal son shows that all things are possible through the Father's love.

In line with the original intent of Proverbs, Edeline wants to teach and warn youth and children through Christian education in the home so that they do not get into alcohol abuse in the first place. Verses like 22:6 show that godly home ministries like this normally succeed.