

Wine and Kisses

John 2:1-11, I Corinthians 11:25

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According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, about 18 million Americans have alcohol problems. More than half of all adults have a family history of problem drinking. One-fourth of all emergency room admissions, one-third of all suicides, and more than one-half of all homicides and incidents of domestic violence are alcohol related.

Almost one-half of all traffic fatalities are alcohol related. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is the leading known cause of mental retardation. Alcohol and drug abuse cost the American economy \$276 billion a year.

Galatians 5:21 states that drunkenness is a work of the flesh. I Corinthians 6:9 is very clear that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God. A couple of years ago I performed the funeral service for my brother-in-law Kurt. He drank himself to death.

Why do we tolerate the stuff *at all*?

I know what some of you are thinking: "The Bible never says we can't drink alcohol in moderation." That's true . . . but consider the following:

1. Some people seem to have genetic dispositions to alcoholism. What if you're one of them? Why expose yourself to possible enslavement? To drink is unsafe.
2. Your drinking may influence others to abuse. As a Christian, you are an example and a testimony.

You must ask yourself in a situation where people are tempted to such sin, where there is abuse, where some might become addicted: What would Jesus do?

Well, fortunately for us, there are at least two instances in Scripture where our Lord encounters alcoholic drink in a social situation. The first is John 2:1-11:

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it.

When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Well, that's just *great!* Jesus hasn't listened to a word I've said! He goes to a wedding feast where, according to the steward, some people seem to have drunk freely. (Their ability to distinguish good wine from bad is diminished.) And He doesn't *warn* them about the hazards of drinking. No! He makes 180 gallons of wine! Just *great.*

The second place in Scripture where Jesus deals with wine is on the night in which He is betrayed. And what does He do with it? Does He warn his disciples against its evil? No! He institutes a sacrament—makes it a holy activity—and says, "Do this in remembrance of me." So now we've got Christians worldwide drinking wine during church in the name of Jesus!

He could have said, "Guys, have some fish soup in memory of me." He could have made it red like blood. But no. He could have turned the water into Root Beer or milk to manifest His glory. But no.

It's embarrassing, and I know you want to defend Him. Some say that in the Bible "wine" is the code word for "grape juice." But if wine really means grape juice, what's the point in saying this? —

"Every man serves the good grape juice first, and when men have drunk freely, then the poor."

"Don't be drunk with grape juice but be filled with the Holy Spirit."

"A deacon must not be addicted to much grape juice."

Paul chastises the Corinthians for getting drunk at communion . . . on grape juice? I don't think so.

If Scripture means grape juice, why doesn't it use the Hebrew and Greek words for grape juice?

You should see how some Bible-believing Christians will twist Scripture to get Jesus off the hook here. But if we don't tolerate twisting Scripture for license, we shouldn't tolerate twisting Scripture for legalism . . . or for getting Jesus off the hook.

It's embarrassing, so for thousands of years we've labored to improve Christ's work through legislation like prohibition, blue laws, age limits, and bartender liability. Obviously more

concerned for the public safety than Jesus, most Protestant churches serve grape juice for communion rather than wine, thereby improving upon the sacrament itself.

But then folks can just read Scripture and mess up our work!

A woman in my old church was surprised to see two of the pastors from our church sitting in a restaurant with glasses of wine. She walked up to them and said, “Oh my . . . I see you’re drinking wine.” One of them responded, “I *know*. I keep asking for water, but every time I touch it, it turns to wine and I can’t get it back again!”

See what I mean?

We laugh, yet my brother-in-law Kurt still drank himself to death. What’s going on here?

Well, clearly if you were at that wedding party and drank too much, that would have been a heinous sin. Yet you couldn’t blame the bartender. You couldn’t blame Jesus, because He’s perfect and without sin.

It’s like the only person you could blame would be . . . *you*.

So if you get plastered tonight, don’t blame me. I rebuke that accusation. And don’t blame Jesus. You *chose* sin.

But, you see, this is what’s troubling us: Jesus just doesn’t seem all that concerned about protecting us from our bad choices! For that matter, God doesn’t seem too concerned either. God is the Creator . . .

Why did He make wine, with the possibility some would get drunk on it?

For that matter, why did He make *anything*? Possessions? . . . with the possibility some would be greedy for them and hoard them while others starved?

Why did He make us with these sex organs? There are so many other biological ways to reproduce. My wife could form a bud on her back that would drop off and turn into a baby. (It wouldn’t be *fun*, but it would be *safe*.) Why did He made sex so fun, with the possibly for fornication, adultery, and rape?

Why did He even make life, with the possibility we’d kill it?

And so some, seeking to improve on this world of sin, have outlawed *everything* . . . like possessions. His name was Karl Marx. Some Christians outlaw *sex*. In fact, there were a few Christians groups throughout history that outlawed *all sex*. Of

course, those groups tended to disappear within a generation or so . . .

You know, if you outlawed everything with the potential for going bad, you'd outlaw everything good, including yourself . . . except, of course, God, who can't go bad. But it seems God would be very lonely.

“God, why did you make wine? Why did you make saturated fats and sex organs? Why did you make *me*? Why did you make the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and then, of all things, place it in the *very middle* of the garden?”

All evil is a good thing gone bad. The better a thing is, the more freedom it has. The more responsibility it has, the more potential for bad it has.

A rock is just a rock. Cattle . . . well, a cow may be capable of a little bad and a little good maybe. People . . . they are capable of great evil but also great good; capable of love. Maybe that's what God wants: beings capable of loving a lonely God . . . or crucifying a lonely God.

Well anyway, Jesus doesn't seem too concerned about protecting these people at the party from bad choices. It's like He *wants* them to have choices. So He says, “Drunkenness is debauchery” (Ephesians 5); “God made wine to gladden the heart of man” (Psalm 104).

“Here's some wine. I hope you don't drink too much.”

God says adultery deserves death. But sex with your spouse is a picture of Christ and His Bride.

“Here are your sex organs and hormones. Hope you use them correctly.”

The Lord says, “I am life, to worship and trust and obey. Anything before me is sin, death, and hell.”

“Here's your life, your will, a garden, a tree of knowledge, and a snake. I hope you love me more than these.”

And maybe that's it. God desires love, and love is a choice that can't be forced but must be made in freedom. It's like a kiss.

When I was growing up I was required by my mom and dad to kiss my sisters, my mom, and my relatives. Sometimes I was even required to kiss very pretty girls not in my immediate family, because that was propriety, a form of greeting, saying hello or good-bye.

It was all nice . . . but twenty-five years ago I kissed this girl, and she kissed me. Her name was Susan Coleman, and she wasn't saying hello *or* good-bye! We kissed because we wanted to, in freedom, and it was *fire!* . . . *power!*

But then again, maybe kisses should be outlawed . . . because there is potential for a lot of sin and a lot of hurt with kisses.

And then again, there is also potential for twenty years of marriage and four wonderful children.

Gosh, with a kiss you could betray your Lord . . . or win a bride.

To be safe, God probably should have made us without lips.

He should have at least given us more laws and more regulations . . . clear, understandable regulations, like the government.

Talk about *regulations* . . .

I'm finishing my basement. Jefferson County regulates *everything* . . . supposedly because all these legislators and lawyers are concerned with my safety. And yet (this is the strange thing) I have no deep, abiding, passionate love for the Jefferson County Building Department.

We often think the Church is for keeping society safe, and so our job is better and stricter legislation, like the Jefferson County Building Department . . . like the Taliban. Talk about a concern for public safety! They *did* outlaw wine and kisses . . . and everything. They must be *really* good . . .

People think that's what Christianity is about: better and better laws and regulations, and trying harder than the religion down the street.

Colossians 2: "Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh."

That is, we are not healed through more and more laws and regulations, adding to God's commands.

I've read that groups like the Jews have very low levels of alcoholism . . . yet they have hardly any regulations. Children drink, but they're taught Scripture. "This is a good gift. Drunkenness is debauchery."

We could argue about statistics and strategies all day, and I'm no expert here, but Paul is clear: "Our sinful passions are aroused by the law." Maybe the answer isn't *more laws*.

Whatever the case, when it comes to the law, Jesus is *frustrating*. His chief opponents were Pharisees and lawyers who added laws upon laws, seeking to define and clarify God's law. Jesus also defines and clarifies God's law. He said, "This is the law: love. Love God with all you've got. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

Well, *that* doesn't make it clear! Or maybe it makes it too painfully clear (to me). Technically, I may not commit adultery, but Jesus says if I look on a woman with lust, I've committed adultery in my heart.

“Well, can I watch Baywatch or not? Yes or no?”

Well, only *I* know my heart . . . and God. I don't *want* the law on my heart. I want it in a book or on a chart or hanging on a tree . . . so I can walk away.

“Jesus, how much should I give? 10%? 20%?”

Jesus says, “Love your neighbor.”

Well, only *I* would know if I love my neighbor . . . and God. And if I really did love my neighbor, I might end up giving *everything*! . . . and getting crucified.

So the lawyer said, “Who's my neighbor?” (“Who do I have to love?”) *More laws*. Jesus told a story and asked the lawyer, “Who proved to be the neighbor?” And the lawyer answered. He *knew*, even though he tried to deny it with his laws. The law was written on his heart: *love*. And love makes neighbors.

“Be more specific, Jesus. How much can I drink? The county gives me a blood alcohol level below which I'm safe.”

Jesus says, “Don't be drunk with wine but filled with the Spirit. Drink must never be an idol.”

Only we know the inside of our bodies . . . and God. Although we deny it and blame society, laws, and family, it's our responsibility to make that choice . . . and we *hate it!* We hire pastors to free us of this burden.

Jesus says, “Love. Don't lust.” It's the youth pastor's job to relieve the kids of that burden and insure public safety; that is, clear, rigid laws.

“Well, kids, that means you can kiss on the twelfth date, as long as it's before 11 p.m., you're outside a motorized vehicle somewhere in sight of your parents' window, and the kiss lasts no longer than *two seconds*.”

Then when the youth pastor down the street says, “I'm sorry, but God desires that the kiss be no more than *half* a second,” we think, “Ooo, he's really spiritual!”

Jesus says, “Love me,” and people want *me* to relieve them of that burden. They want me to tell them what that means . . .

“Give 10% before taxes.”

“Read Scripture a half-hour a day.”

“Never watch the Osbournes.”

But a demon from Hell can fulfill that law.

The law of God is love, and it's your responsibility. When love fails, we want job descriptions and we call lawyers. We are the Bride of Christ, and we're addicted to legislation.

When Susan and I have a conflict and start arguing, often one of us will get tired and frustrated and say something like, "Look. Just tell me what you want me to do. Tell me what you want me to *do*, Peter!" And I can't tell her, because it's what I want her to *be*: a bride in love with me. And when she's a loving, passionate, faithful bride, she'll *know* what to do. I want her to do what that love desires in freedom.

We go through struggles in our lives and say, "God, what do you want me to *do?!?*" Silence. It's what He wants you to *be*: a loving, faithful Bride. And then truly we *know* what we should do:

Love like a loving, faithful Bride,
in all things,
without compulsion but freely,
in blissful submission,
in love.

But we can't. We see our shame. We're dead. Our love died long ago. When? The Bride chose the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "The knowledge of good and evil" — What *is* that? Isn't that the law?

We had God, but we chose the law. We made an idol of the tree—the law. We have such a strange relationship with the law.

We love it, yet we hate it, yet we love it.
We deny it ("I didn't *know* what God wanted . . .").
We depend on it, justifying ourselves with it.
We've ingested it and now we're addicted to it.

Adam and Eve ingested the law, so they knew the law and they knew they were naked. So they hated the law—the fruit—yet they tried to justify themselves with the law —the fruit.

They blamed each other;
they blamed the snake;
they hid.

We know the law in our hearts, and we try to regurgitate it back on the tree, saying, "It's not *my* fault! I didn't *know*. Father, it's not my fault . . . *you* never said I couldn't hit Becky in the head with a stick. I didn't *know!*"

"Then why are you hiding?"

Romans 2: Paul says we are “without excuse.” “The law is written on our hearts.” Why the old covenant law? —

Romans 5: “The law came in to increase the trespass.” God puts the idol in our face to help us see we’re enslaved to death. “Choke on it!”

The truth is that on our own none of us can choose the good. We’re so infected with shame and fear . . . so cut off from God and addicted to the tree. None of us can love as God loves. We are powerless. Admit it!

Just like the addict is enslaved to his drug,
fueled by his thirst,
We’re enslaved to the law,
fueled by our pride—our flesh.
Addicted to the tree,
we love it yet hate it;
we deny it yet depend on it.

An alcoholic feels shame over drinking . . . then turns to alcohol for comfort . . . then feels more shame.

A sinner feels shame because of the law . . . then turns to the law for comfort . . . then feels more shame.

Maybe that day at the wedding feast Jesus knew we’re addicted. But the most powerful addiction and the most dangerous idol is not some drink; it’s a tree in a garden. And it’s pointless to cure a lesser addiction with a greater addiction, to slay a lesser idol with a greater idol.

So the wedding was threatened, for the bride listened to a snake and called the lawyer.

The wedding in Cana was threatened, but the answer wasn’t law (water); the answer was wine. And the wine is blood, the blood of the wounded Bridegroom.

Jesus said to the servant, “Fill the jars with water.” The jars were used for ritual cleansing according to the law. Jesus took *those* jars filled to the brim—all the law . . . He took the water and turned it to wine; not applied, but ingested and digested and metabolized. It was a sign, and it manifested His glory.

Three years later He was glorified, lifted from the earth on a cross. The night before, He took wine and said, “This is the new covenant in my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.” In the morning the Bride nailed Him to the tree.

I believe the tree is somehow the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Christ was crucified on our idol by our idolatry.

We crucified the Good Himself
 on our knowledge of good;
We impaled Love Himself
 on our knowledge of love,
And the Lawgiver
 on His law.

And on the cross He absorbed our iniquities and suffered the just penalty of our crimes.

So . . . whenever you look to the law, see Jesus.
 whenever you look to the tree, see Jesus.

Bride of Christ, look at your Groom and His love for you.

John 12: "Lifted up, crucified, He romanced all men to himself."

- The cross is the Father's kiss of supreme love on a rebellious world.
- The cross is the prodigal father's kiss on the prodigal son's face as he whispers, "No more shame. No more fear. No more hiding. No more justifying. No more condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. For I have done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do, sending my Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. And for sin I *condemned* sin in the flesh."

He condemned condemnation. Christ fulfilled the law, and God raised Him from the dead.

It's finished.

So in Christ you're free . . . to love God without fear and shame. And when you love Him without fear and shame, you fulfill the law. See . . .

Law is good when God, who is Love, is in His place.
Wine is good when God, who is Love, is in His place.

Your god is not wine, and your god is not law.
Your savior is not wine, and your savior is not law.

Your God and your Savior is Jesus Christ the Lord.

I think that for a while my brother-in-law's god was wine, and it filled him with shame. I bet Kurt tried to make a million laws. ("I'm not going to do that again.") But they didn't save him. They filled him with more shame.

I visited him in the hospital right before he died, and I read him the story of the prodigal son. At the end I said, "Kurt, what did you think?" He said, "Oh that's cool!" A few days later I asked Kurt, "Are you ready to meet Jesus?" He said, "Oh, yeah! Let's *do* it!" And we prayed.

I don't think Kurt is a drunkard. I think he's a prodigal son at his Father's banquet drinking new wine.

If you struggle with alcohol, or sin, your hope isn't better laws. Your hope is Jesus . . . confessing your sin . . . believing His grace . . . trusting His power. He is the Highest Power.

And if you say to Him, "I never want alcohol to touch my lips again, for I am easily tempted, and I must flee temptation for the love of you," then *you* made that law freely, in love. It's law in service of love, it's law in its proper place, and it's so good.

But if you stumble, don't look to the law first. Look at who's hanging on the law for the love of you. He loves you no less. Confess your sin, believe His grace, drink His wine—His blood—His life. We stole fruit; He gave us His life to drink.

In I Corinthians 11 Paul records that at communion Jesus took the wine and said, "As often as you drink it, do it in memory of me."

What if He really meant that?!

What if every time we drank (if we did) we remembered Jesus and communed with him?

Well, it would be a holy activity. And maybe we'd drink or not drink *just the right amount*. How so? — The law is written on our hearts. Even more, the Lawgiver, who is love, lives inside. And lo and behold, we know good and evil. We choose the good in love, made in the image of God.

What if every moment we "remembered" and "communed" with Jesus? Our entire lives would be a holy activity as we commune with the kiss of God. Trust the kiss, or you'll be enslaved to the old idols. "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Fyodor Dostoevsky told a story through the mouth of one of the atheist brothers in his novel, The Brothers Karamazov. The atheist thinks it vilifies Christ, but the Christian thinks it glorifies Christ.

In the story, Jesus returns during the Spanish Inquisition in Seville, Spain, a time when the Church enforced Christianity with law and made the Pharisees look mild. Jesus walks the street. He loves the crowd and heals them and sets them free. But the Grand Inquisitor has Him arrested, not because He doesn't know who he is; he knows all too well. Jesus is locked in the dungeon, and the Grand Inquisitor hurls his accusations:

““Instead of seizing men's freedom, You gave them even more of it! Have You forgotten that peace, and even death, is more attractive to man than the freedom of choice that derives from the knowledge of good and evil? There is nothing more alluring to man than freedom of conscience, but neither is there anything more agonizing.

“And yet, instead of giving them something tangible to calm their consciences forever, You came to them with words that were unfamiliar, vague, and indefinite; You offered them something that was quite beyond them; it even looked as if You didn’t love them, You who came to give them Your life! Instead of ridding men of their freedom, You increased their freedom, and You imposed everlasting torment on man’s soul.

“You wanted to gain man’s love so that he would follow You of his own free will, fascinated and captivated by You. In place of the clear and rigid ancient law, You made man decide about good and evil for himself, with no other guidance than Your example. But did it never occur to You that man would disregard Your example, even question it, as well as Your truth, when he was subjected to so fearful a burden as freedom of choice? . . .

“And men rejoice at being led like cattle again, with the terrible gift of freedom that brought them so much suffering removed from them. Tell me, were we right in preaching and acting as we did? Was it not our love for men that made us resign ourselves to the idea of their impotence and lovingly try to lighten the burden of their responsibility, even allowing their weak nature to sin, but with our permission? Why have You come to interfere with our work? And why do You look at me silently with those gentle eyes of Yours? Be angry with me. I do not want Your love, because I do not love You myself. . . .

“Tomorrow You will see obedient herds, at the first sign from me, hurry to heap coals on the fire beneath the stake at which I shall have You burned, because, by coming here, You have made our task more difficult. For if anyone has ever deserved our fire, it is You, and I shall have You burned tomorrow. . . !” . . .

“The Grand Inquisitor falls silent and waits for some time for the prisoner to answer. The prisoner’s silence has weighed on him. He has watched Him; He listened to him intently, looking gently into his eyes, and apparently unwilling to speak. The old man longs for Him to say something, however painful and terrifying. But instead, He suddenly goes over to the old man and kisses him gently on his old, bloodless lips. And that is His only answer. The old man is startled and shudders. The corners of his lips seem to quiver slightly. He walks to the door, opens it, and says to Him, ‘Go now, and do not come back . . . ever. You must never, never come again!’ And he lets the prisoner out into the dark streets of the city. The prisoner leaves.”

“And what about the old man?”

“The kiss glows in his heart . . . But the old man sticks to his old idea.”

You’re the Grand Inquisitor imprisoned in your own dungeon. In the name of Jesus, let the kiss consume you.

When I began my sermon, many of you felt a catch inside of you: “Sometimes I drink too much.” If you’ve ever drunk too much, would you raise your hand? *My* hand is raised. Let’s talk to Jesus about it.

“Lord Jesus, *you* saw us. We confess, Lord Jesus, that we think we might have, so we probably did drink too much. Jesus, thank you for forgiving us. Jesus, next time we have a glass of wine, if we do, may we commune with you. And may we drink you. Amen.”

In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

Now, how many of you have ever said something that was slander? How many of you have ever gossiped? Raise your hand. *My* hand is up. Let's talk to Jesus about it.

"Lord Jesus, we confess that we have murdered people in our hearts, and God, you see our hearts. Jesus, some of us may have even told ourselves, 'I'm going to hold my tongue next time,' and we *blew* it, Lord. We made a law and we blew it. Thank you, Jesus, that you have forgiven us. Next time we speak to you, may we commune with you; may we speak you."

In the name of Jesus, you're forgiven. Amen.

How many of you have ever felt like you bought more than you were supposed to? How many of you have ever felt greedy? Raise your hand. Let's talk to Jesus about it.

"Oh, God, we confess that we struggle with greed; we're Americans, God, while the world starves to death. God, I really struggle with this one. We confess it. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have forgiven us. Jesus, next time we go to the store, please go with us. Shop with us, Jesus. Thank you."

In the name of Jesus, you're forgiven.

How many of you ever feel like you're a jerk? Like the very thing you want to do you *don't* do? How many of you measure yourself by other people and think inside, "I suck"? Is that you? Talk to Jesus about it.

"Lord Jesus, I confess that I've condemned myself. I've cursed myself. Lord Jesus, those curses have fallen on you. I have not believed your Gospel, and I've looked to my idol—the law. So, Lord Jesus, I confess that I'm a sinner."

Say that silently in your heart, and now call to Jesus, "Save me, Jesus."

"Thank you, Lord, that you have, and that you've forgiven us, and that we are washed clean, and that we are yours."

If you just prayed that prayer for the first time, *that's* what Christianity is all about.

"So, Lord Jesus, may we take every breath with you, communing with you."

In the name of Jesus, you're forgiven. Amen.

Further Reading

Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit. What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me.

-Romans 7:4-11

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

-Galatians 5:1

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

-Colossians 2:16-3:4

If Jesus' critique of legalism was not devastating enough, the apostle Paul added another, fundamental complaint. Legalism fails miserably at the one thing it is supposed to do: encourage obedience. In a strange twist, a system of strict laws actually puts new ideas of lawbreaking in a person's mind. Paul explains, "For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'do not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire." In a demonstration of this principle, some surveys show that people raised in teetotaling denominations are three times as likely to become alcoholics.

-Philip Yancey, What's So Amazing About Grace