

## Message #49 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

### *“Eating, Drinking, And Smoking”*

With Randy Smith

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk about drinking and smoking. I mean, from a Christian standpoint. This is a really big thing in religious circles, but is looked at differently from denomination to denomination. Some of the churches which are more lenient in their doctrine allow people in their congregations to smoke and drink, and nothing is much said about it. Even Billy Graham, one of the best known evangelists of our day, at one time smoked a pipe. This was in his younger days. I'm not certain, but there seems to be some evidence that he stopped smoking because of how people reacted to it, trying to be more concerned for others than for his own desire to smoke. Of course, this is a good example of what the apostle Paul encourages us to do in 1 Corinthians 8:13; to be concerned for others so that we don't cause them to stumble by what we ourselves allow.

At one time smoking was not considered such an evil habit. But, today there are many churches which come down very hard on anyone who drinks or smokes, and will insist that drinkers and smokers will all go to hell. Maybe they have a better inside track on this than I do, but then they are free to give their opinion. No, I don't think smoking is good for you, and neither do I think that people should be running around getting drunk. But I'd like to have you take a look at

another side of this and see if there isn't something under the surface that might give us better understanding of this subject.

First of all let's look at how the current doctrines prohibiting the use of tobacco and alcohol were formed. We know that the concept of drunkenness has been around since the beginning of written history. The Bible clearly gives exhortation against drunkenness. In our current era, we know that drunkenness has been the culprit of many abuses, not just to the health and welfare of the persons themselves, but also to spouses, children, and a large assortment of other people. The response to this in many instances has been to create a Christian doctrine which condemns the use of alcohol. And once again, let me say that I am not suggesting alcohol is wonderful, but am trying to get deeper than this. I want you to see more than just the surface concept of it. But for now, let's jump to the subject of tobacco.

Smoking or chewing is enjoyed by many people. If it wasn't an enjoyment, or at least pleasant to them in some way, they wouldn't do it. However, the people who are around smokers and chewers don't enjoy the smoking and chewing. It's an irritant. The smoke of cigarettes, cigars, and pipes, for the most part, is offensive. The anti-smoking and chewing doctrine was born out of the desire to keep the stink of smoking tobacco away from others, and to keep tobacco chewers from spitting on sidewalks, floors, or maybe even on other people. Nobody can say that smoking and chewing is pleasant for those who are in close proximity with users of tobacco. In the same sense, nobody can say that being around a drunk is nice, except maybe by another drunk. But sometimes we get carried away with our religious doctrine, and later, when we take a closer look at it, we realize that the laws we've made against certain habits might not be concerned so much with what is pleasing to God, but tends to establish a doctrine for our own protection or comfort. It's easy to see an evil, and then make a law that prohibits that person from doing anything which might even be remotely associated with it. In short, we Christians tend to make laws which go much further than what is necessary. It's kind of like instead of cutting out the cancer from someone, we just kill them. That way we are sure the cancer won't grow. Of course, that's a little silly, but maybe not all that much off the track, if you are beginning to see what I mean. We have a tendency for overkill in our doctrine whenever we want to prohibit people from offending us, and then turn it into a doctrine which claims that we are looking out for God's interests.

Now, let me relate an experience I had once in a church. I was a fairly new Christian at the time, and we were attending a nice little church with some very nice people. One Sunday they announced that we would be having a dessert fellowship on the following Sunday evening after church, and all the ladies were encouraged to bring their best dessert. Now, for me, this was a terrible thing. I have always had to struggle against food. In fact, I still struggle, but not as much as I did back then. I was standing at the back of the church next to a lady, and I leaned over to her and said, "A dessert fellowship?" And she replied, "Yes!" Then I said, "But I'm really struggling with gluttony." She just looked sideways at me like I was an alien or something. Then I said, "If people were alcoholics, we wouldn't invite them to a booze fellowship would we? Why would the church want to invite people who are struggling against gluttony to a

fellowship with nothing but desserts?” She replied, “Well, we've always done it this way.” I didn't say anymore. I figured I had already put my foot into my mouth far enough. One of only a few times I have stopped before sealing my fate.

Anyway, they had the dessert fellowship, but I stayed away from church that night. It was too much temptation for me. You know, it's interesting that we can be so concerned about something that is bad for your health like smoking or excessive drinking, but nobody thinks twice about pigging out. When it comes to tobacco and alcohol use, people are sometimes excommunicated from church at the drop of a hat. But when it comes to eating sweets and fats in enormous quantities, all we have to do is look for a church potluck or fellowship dinner.

No, I'm not suggesting that eating a piece of pie is unreasonable, but what I am saying is that we need to take a look at our self-made set of rules for the church and see if all we are interested in is pointing the finger at those who are offensive to us. Maybe it's time to stop living under a set of laws and start looking at the heart. After all, what's the point of telling a person that he is going to hell for smoking when you are eating your third helping from the dessert table? We Christians tend to dwell on self-justification rather than justification by faith. We tend to dwell on legalistic views instead of laws which are written on the fleshly tables of our hearts.

I know this is not a popular subject, and there are probably many of you out there who are offended by what I am saying. But then, our radio program was not created to make people feel good about themselves. In this program, we like to look at things up close, even if it doesn't seem to fit into the current church lifestyle. Taking a close look at ourselves is healthy. In fact, much healthier than eating at a dessert fellowship.

The Bible puts both drunkards and gluttons into the same category. But I would like you to notice something. In scripture, it is never alcohol or food that is condemned, but rather, the overindulgence of either of them. It is a well known fact that God allows Christians to eat. But, apparently, it is a little known fact that alcohol is not forbidden either. But my point is not that it is a good idea to consume alcohol, but rather that those who are pointing the finger at others are not looking at what they are doing themselves. Also, consider this. Many people claim that the wine that Jesus drank was only grape juice. But, it is interesting to look at the original words in the Bible for the word, wine. In the Old Testament, the word for wine was 'yayin'. The word itself meant to effervesce. The New Testament word is 'oinos', which is similar to the Old Testament word. Both of these words refer to wine, which effervesces. It bubbles.

Now, grape juice does not effervesce except when it is turning into wine. It creates bubbles when it is creating alcohol. This is what Jesus was referring to when he told the parable about the new wine and old wine, and that the new wine had to be put into new bottles. The bottles were a reference to leather bladders which, because they were new, were elastic. They would stretch, they would expand, as the grape juice became wine by effervescing. Old leather wine bottles would become hardened, losing their elasticity. If the new wine was put into them, the

expansion from the bubbles would cause the wine to expand and the old wine bottles would rupture from the pressure.

I know it is a very difficult thing for some Christians to realize that Jesus, and his disciples, drank wine. However, this does not mean that they were drunkards. We see, in Acts, chapter two, that the twelve apostles were accused of being drunk by those who heard them speak in tongues. Notice that Peter did not reply that they never touched the stuff, but explained to them that this was an unreasonable accusation, not because of the wine, but because of the time of day. He said that it was only the third hour of the day, which inferred that no one would be drunk yet, because the day hadn't stretched on long enough. Let me give you another instance. In the Old Testament, God gave instructions for the Israelites concerning eating and drinking their sacrifices when they had to travel to Jerusalem from a long distance away. In Deuteronomy 14, we have the description of God's instructions to the people for the tithing of their annual increase. Once a year they were to travel to Jerusalem and offer the tithes of their increase to God. Part of it was given to the priests, but the rest of it was to be eaten by the people before the Lord as they rejoiced in the Lord for his goodness unto them.

The interesting part of this is that if the distance to Jerusalem was too far for them to carry all the tithes of their increase there, they were to sell those things at home, turning the goods into money, and then when they got to Jerusalem they were to buy whatever they wanted and eat it before the Lord. And now, here's what I want you to see. Let me read what God himself said, in Deuteronomy 14:25-26. "Then shall you turn it into money, and bind up the money in your hand, and shall go to the place which the LORD your God shall choose: 26 And you shall bestow that money for whatever your soul desires, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatever your soul desires: and you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you, and your household."

Notice that God told them they could purchase wine or strong drink to be consumed with rejoicing before the Lord at his temple. The word wine, in the original language, is the same word for wine as I have just described. And the word for strong drink means strong drink, as that which is fermented from a fruit or grain. No, God wasn't telling them to get drunk. God wasn't telling them to drink till their eyes popped out of their sockets. But he was telling them that drinking these alcoholic drinks was permissible. But again, I'm not telling you to drink. I'm not telling you to smoke. But what I am telling you is that it is time that the church stops condemning people for overindulging, when they are overindulging themselves. If you think it is acceptable in the Lord's sight to condemn those who drink moderately, or to condemn those who misuse their bodies with tobacco, but you yourself can pig out at every church fellowship or family get-together, I think you had better take a good look at yourself. In fact, it would be a good idea if we, the church, all took a good look at ourselves. How many times do we quote church commandments because it points the finger at others but not at ourselves? How many times have you seen gluttonous people pointing their fingers at smokers and drinkers? How many times do you find yourself part of a conversation in church or by Christians outside of church where the talk centers around food, and when someone talks about overindulging, people

just kind of laugh it off as if it was just a big joke? But it isn't a big joke to God! He didn't put us here to overindulge ourselves with food, drink, or any other thing that is just a stimulation of the flesh.

Have you ever been in conversation with others and talked about eating some kind of special food or dessert, and talked about eating these special foods with so much enthusiasm that you almost drool at the mouth? O.K. I've been there myself. But little by little the Lord has dealt with me about eating for the sake of nutrition, and not for the sake of stimulation of the flesh. No, I don't feel that God is saying that food has to taste bad, but rather that when we concentrate on the taste of food in order to bring out the natural flavor, we need to stop there and not go on to the point that we focus on the taste instead of just pleasant nutrition. Proverbs 23:1-3, says, "When you sit to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before you: 2 And put a knife to your throat, if you are a man given to appetite. 3 Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat."

This scripture instructs us to control our appetites, and to stay away from those things which are not healthy for us. In Biblical times, a ruler would be generally well-to-do, and would be able to put food on the table that was sumptuously prepared. Dainty food refers to food which is especially refined to titillate the taste buds. Examples of dainties might be any food that is prepared to be especially tasty. It might be pheasant under glass, or it might be cherry cheesecake, or apple pie. In Biblical times, food would fall into the dainty category if it was more than bread, milk, cheese, and fruit, which was the normal diet of the average population. To have specially cooked foods, or specially prepared desserts, is to eat elegantly or daintily. In short, it is eating food that is prepared more for the taste than it is for the nutrition. Any time you concentrate on taste instead of nutrition, you are wandering into the territory which leads to gluttony. In this current end-time society, Satan has managed to make dainty foods the norm, the everyday foods of everyday people, at least in all except the third world countries. Yet Christians don't realize this. They've been deceived into thinking that all the specially prepared foods and desserts are the normal way of eating. But this is just one more way that Satan has been able to get God's people to delight themselves in things of the earth instead of things above.

Overweight people are, generally speaking, gluttonous. Now hold it a minute. I'm overweight too, so I'm including myself in this category. But although being overweight is something that is in your fleshly man, it doesn't mean that it should be in your heart. When it comes to sin, we must remember that the sin is in our flesh, not in our heart; that is, as long as our hearts are right before God. But being overweight is an indication that food is more important for you than it should be. But then again, I want you to understand what the point of this message is today. I'm not railing against fat people, nor am I suggesting that drinking or smoking is good for you. What I am saying is that we are a society of Christians who have learned to point our fingers at those who smoke or drink, even moderately, as workers of iniquity, yet many of us eat to excess and never even give it a second thought.

If we, as Christians, determine that drinking and smoking is evil, then we must also be able to state the reason why it is evil. And the reason that drinking and smoking could fall into this category is that these can be hazardous to your health, especially if used immoderately. If we, as Christians, point our fingers at others and condemn them for partaking of things which are hazardous to their health, then won't God do the same thing to us if we cause a hazard to our own health by the way we eat? The Bible tells us in Matthew 7:2, that we will be judged by God in the same manner that we judge others. Therefore, if you endanger your health by eating immoderately, yet, you accuse others of being evil because they risk their health with their use of alcohol or tobacco, then God will look at you and see that you are eating in an unhealthy manner, and will also condemn you by the same law you made for others, that of wilfully endangering your health. If you make a law for someone else, you are subject to that same law. And not just to the specific rule, but to the basic concept of it also.

The bottom line is this. Whether you like to hear it or not, wine was a normal part of the nutrition in Biblical times, and those who drank wine, including Jesus and his disciples, used it in a respectable manner. They did not overindulge in it and become drunkards. And neither did Jesus overindulge in food and set around holding his stomach because he ate too much on a feast day. It is all too easy for Christians to overindulge in food, and then to set around moaning and groaning and never even give a thought about repenting of their gluttonous activity. Most of the time they just laugh about it like it was some big joke. But food was not meant to be eaten for gluttonous purposes, but for nutritional purposes. Yes, I do believe God does give us the ability to enjoy the flavor of food, and different particular tastes. But to add all the flavorings and sugars and sauces and toppings and then gorge ourselves, is contrary to living in the spirit. We used to live in the flesh before we were born-again. But once we have been born again, why do we seek to go back to things of this world? We are told to seek those things which are above, and not to set our affection on things of this earth. Yes, you are forgiven for your sins because of your repentant heart and the blood of Jesus Christ. But when you overindulge gleefully at Thanksgiving, the church potluck supper, or, shudder, shudder, the church dessert fellowship, don't tell me that this wasn't an intent to sin the sin of gluttony. Hebrews 10:26, tells us that when we sin wilfully, God no longer forgives us. We can't act like pigs and wallow in the mire and still come out smelling like a rose. If we're going to be Christians, why are we so engrossed in stimulations of the flesh?

If you're a man, or woman, who loves food, not only should you put a knife to your throat, as King Solomon suggested, in order to escape the destruction that the immoderate use of these dainty foods bring, but you should stop pointing your finger at others who might not be any more overindulgent in unhealthy things than you are. If you're pointing your finger at others who smoke or drink, you might be pointing the finger at yourself, too? And if you're condemning them to hell for endangering their health, then where do you think you're headed?