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# AN EXAMINATION OF PROVERBS 31:6–7

*Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.*

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## THE PROBLEM

This text seems to endorse the idea that those who are dying, emotionally distraught, poverty stricken, and in misery should use alcohol to relieve their discomfort and escape their problems. Such advice seems inconsistent with the general message of Scripture.

## QUESTIONS

1. Is Lemuel's mother really commending alcohol as a way to drown out one's pain and sorrow, or is it merely a recognition of what was commonly practiced?
2. Is this advice merely a record of a human opinion or divinely inspired prescription?
3. Is there anything different about the present that would influence how we apply this today (e.g., the differences in alcoholic beverages)?
4. Is this a condoning of drunkenness or just moderate drinking to relieve physical and emotional pain?
5. What is the precise meaning of **לְאוֹבֵד**? Is this a reference to death, or possible to some more general misfortune?
6. What is the precise meaning of **לְמַרֵי נֶפֶשׁ**? Is this a reference to an emotional condition?
7. What is the precise force of the verbs **יִשְׁכַּח**, **יִשְׁכַּח**, and **יִזְכֵּר**? Do they all have the same force? Are they jussive, carrying an imperatival force? Are they modal? Are they merely futurative?

## THE TEXT

### THE PASSAGE IN HEBREW (BHS)

6 תִּנּוּ-שִׁכָּר לְאוֹבֵד וְיֵין לְמַרֵי נֶפֶשׁ:  
7 יִשְׁכַּח וְיִשְׁכַּח רִישׁוֹ וְעַמְלֹו לֹא יִזְכֵּר-עוֹד:

### TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW

6 Give [pl.] intoxicating drink to the one who is perishing [or *dying*; HALOT: *disheartened*; Gesenius: *to be ready to perish, to be wretched, unfortunate*] and wine to the bitter [pl.] of soul [HALOT: *provoked*; BDB *bitter, gloomy, discontented of soul*]. 7 He will drink [or *he is to drink*] and forget his poverty, and his trouble [BDB: *trouble, sorrow, suffering*] he will not remember [or *he is not to remember*] again [or *still*].

## THE PASSAGE IN GREEK (LXX)

6 δίδοτε μέθην τοῖς ἐν λύπαις καὶ οἶνον πίνειν τοῖς ἐν ὀδύναϊς, 7 ἵνα ἐπιλάθωνται τῆς πενίας καὶ τῶν πόνων μὴ μνησθῶσιν ἔτι.

## TRANSLATION OF THE GREEK

6 Give [pl.] strong drink to the ones in grief [pl.] and wine to drink to the ones in pain [pl.] 7 in order that they might forget his poverty, and his labors [or *toil, pain, affliction, distress, grief*] not remember again [or still].

## THE CONTEXT

### THE PASSAGE IN ENGLISH (ESV)

**Proverbs 31:1–9** 1 The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him: 2 What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows? 3 Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings. 4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, 5 lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. 6 Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; 7 let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more. 8 Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. 9 Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

### THE ARGUMENT OF THE PERICOPE

The whole pericope is a record of the words given to King Lemuel<sup>1</sup> by his mother. Lemuel's mother warns him to beware of women (v 3) and wine (vv 4–5). A king's judgment must not be impaired. Rather, he must show concern for the afflicted (5–9). The point of the pericope is not to prescribe the proper use of wine, but to give guidance to the King.

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<sup>1</sup> Lemuel is the Hebrew לִמְעוּל, which, according to the LXX (ὕπὸ θεοῦ) should be understood as לִמְעוּל + אֱלֹהִים—לִמְעוּלֵי אֱלֹהִים, being an elongated form of לֵ. A similar option is to translate it as “belonging to God.” The Jews identified Lemuel as Solomon.

## COMPARISON OF ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

**ASV:** 6 Give strong drink unto **him that is ready to perish**, And wine unto **the bitter in soul**: 7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty, And remember his misery no more.

**AMP:** 6 Give strong drink [as medicine] to **him who is ready to pass away**, and wine to **him in bitter distress of heart**. 7 Let him drink and forget his poverty and [seriously] remember his want *and* misery no more.

**AV 1873:** 6 Give strong drink unto **him that is ready to perish**, And wine unto **those that be of heavy hearts [Heb. bitter of soul]**. 7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty, And remember his misery no more.

**CEV:** 6 Beer and wine are only for **the dying** or for **those who have lost all hope**. 7 Let them drink and forget how poor and miserable they feel.

**DARBY:** 6 Give strong drink unto **him that is ready to perish**, and wine unto **the bitter of soul**: 7 let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

**ESV:** 6 Give strong drink to **the one who is perishing**, and wine to **those in bitter distress [Hebrew those bitter in soul]**; 7 let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.

**Geneva:** 6 Giue ye strong drinke vnto **him that is readie to perish**, and wine vnto **them that haue grieffe of heart**. 7 Let him drinke, that he may forget his pouertie, and remember his miserie no more.

**GNT:** 6 Alcohol is for **people who are dying**, for **those who are in misery**. 7 Let them drink and forget their poverty and unhappiness.

**HCSB:** 6 Give beer to **one who is dying**, and wine to **one whose life is bitter**. 7 Let him drink so that he can forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more.

**KJV:** 6 Give strong drink unto **him that is ready to perish**, and wine unto **those that be of heavy hearts**. 7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

**The Living Bible:** Hard liquor is for **sick men at the brink of death**, and wine for **those in deep depression**. Let them drink to forget their poverty and misery.

**The Message:** Use wine and beer only as sedatives, to kill the pain and dull the ache of **the terminally ill**, for **whom life is a living death**.

**NET:** 6 Give strong drink to **the one who is perishing**, and wine to **those who are bitterly distressed**; 7 let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.

**NAB:** 6 Give strong drink to **one who is perishing**, and wine to **the sorely depressed**; 7 When they drink, they will forget their misery, and think no more of their burdens.

**NASB95:** 6 Give strong drink to **him who is perishing**, And wine to **him whose life is bitter [lit bitter of soul]**. 7 Let him drink and forget his poverty And remember his trouble no more.

**NCV:** 6 Give beer to **people who are dying** and wine to **those who are sad**. 7 Let them drink and forget their need and remember their misery no more.

**NIV:** 6 Give beer to **those who are perishing**, wine to **those who are in anguish**; 7 let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.

**NJB:** 6 Procure strong drink for **someone about to die**, wine for **him whose heart is heavy**: 7 let him drink and forget his misfortune, and remember his misery no more.

**NKJV** 6 Give strong drink to **him who is perishing**, And wine to **those who are bitter of heart**. 7 Let him drink and forget his poverty, And remember his misery no more.

**NLT:** 6 Alcohol is for **the dying**, and wine for **those in bitter distress**. 7 Let them drink to forget their poverty and remember their troubles no more.

**NRSV:** 6 Give strong drink to **one who is perishing**, and wine to **those in bitter distress**; 7 let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.

**RSV:** 6 Give strong drink to **him who is perishing**, and wine to **those in bitter distress**; 7 let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.

**Revised Websters:** 6 Give strong drink to **him that is ready to perish**, and wine to **those that are of heavy hearts**. 7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

**YLT:** 6 Give strong drink to **the perishing**, And wine to **the bitter in soul**, 7 He drinketh, and forgetteth his poverty, And his misery he remembereth not again.

## COMMENTARIES AND OTHER SOURCES

### COMMENTARIES

**Believer's Bible Commentary:** The medicinal use of wine is sanctioned as a stimulant for the dying and an anti-depressant for the despondent. It is all right for people like these to drink, and to forget their need and their misery.

**The Bible Knowledge Commentary:** Beer (“strong drink”; cf. comments on 20:1) and wine (mentioned in reverse order from the way they are mentioned in 31:4) may have been acceptable as anesthetics or drugs to deaden physical pain or deep emotional bitterness (and the pain of those who were dying). Or verses 6–7 may be saying that though others may have used drink as an escape, the king was not to do so.

**Adam Clarke:** We have already seen, that inebriating drinks were mercifully given to condemned criminals, to render them less sensible of the torture they endured in dying. This is what was offered to our Lord; but he refused it. See Clarke’s note on Ps 104:15.

**Keil & Delitzsch:** The preparation of a potion for malefactors who were condemned to death was, on the ground of these words of the proverb, cared for by noble women in Jerusalem (נשים יקרות שבירושלים), *Sanhedrin* 43a; Jesus rejected it, because He wished, without becoming insensible to His sorrow, to pass away from the earthly life freely and in full consciousness, Mark 15:23. The transition from the plur. to the sing. of the subject is in v. 7 less violent than in v. 5, since in v. 6 singular and plur. already interchange. We write תְּנוּ-יִשְׁכַּר with the counter-tone *Metheg* and *Mercha*. אֹבֵד designates, as at Job 29:13; 31:19, one who goes to meet destruction: it combines the present signification *interiens*, the fut. signif. *interiturus*, and the perf. *perditus* (hopelessly lost). מְרֵי נַפֶּשׁ (those whose minds are filled with sorrow) is also supported from the Book of Job, 3:20, cf. 21:25, the language and thought and mode of writing of which notably rests on the Proverbs of Agur and Lemuel (vid., Mühlau, pp. 64–66). The *Venet.* τοῖς πικροῖς (not ψυχροῖς) τὴν ψυχὴν. רֵשׁ (poverty) is not, however, found there, but only in the Book of Proverbs, in which this word-stem is more at home than elsewhere. Wine rejoices the heart of man, Ps. 104:15, and at the same time raises it for the time above oppression and want, and out of anxious sorrow, wherefore it is soonest granted to them, and in sympathizing love ought to be presented to them by whom this its beneficent influence is to be wished for. The ruined man forgets his poverty, the deeply perplexed his burden of sorrow; the king, on the contrary, is in danger from this cause of forgetting what the law required at his hands, viz., in relation to those who need help, to whom especially his duty as a ruler refers.

**Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown:** The proper use of such drinks is to restore tone to feeble bodies and depressed minds (compare Ps 104:15).

**Concise Bible Commentary:** Strong drink deadens pain and dulls the mind. Therefore, among the people who seek after it are those whose distress is so great that life seems to have no more hope for them.

**Concordia Self-Study Bible:** While overindulgence in alcoholic drink is to be shunned (20:1; 23:29–35), its use is recommended to deaden the pain of those perishing and to “gladden the heart” of those in *bitter distress*. (Ps 104:15; Mt 27:34, 48; 1 Ti 5:23)

**Crawford Toy, ICC:** Two proper occasions for the use of alcoholic drinks: bodily suffering (from hunger and want) and mental distress. In v. 6b lit.: *to those who are bitter of soul*. The quatrain is symmetrical—v. 6a is explained by v. 7a, and v. 6b by v. 7b. V. 7 is parallel to v. 5.

**Evangelical Commentary on the Bible:** Lemuel’s mother recommends alcohol as a remedy for depression or those at death’s door, presumably because the latter have no future.

**Handbook on Proverbs:** The argument that continues in verses 6 and 7 is that it is all right for people who are suffering bodily pain and mental distress to use intoxicating drinks, but “not for kings” (verse 4). **Give strong drink to him who is perishing:** **Strong drink** and **wine** are the same terms as in verse 4. **Give** is an imperative, but in the context of the whole saying this does not seem to be a command to go and supply alcohol to all the people mentioned in verses 6 and 7. It is rather that “alcohol is [useful] for those who are . . .”; see TEV and also CEV “Beer and wine are only for . . .” **Him who is perishing** is taken by many to mean “someone about to die” (NJB) or “people who are dying” (TEV). **And wine to those in bitter distress:** This adds another group to those mentioned in the previous line. **In bitter distress** is literally “to those who are bitter of soul”; Scott renders this as “whose life is bitter,” NIV “who are in anguish,” TEV “who are in misery,” and CEV “who have lost all hope.” Languages often have their own idiomatic ways of expressing discouraged people, such as “people who have big heavy things.” **Let them drink and forget their poverty:** The verb form is actually singular in Hebrew, but the reference is clearly back to the people described in verse 6, and the plural **let them drink** is required if plurals have been used there. This is not an imperative, and it may have the sense of “they can drink to forget . . .”; in one language, for example, it is translated as “If they want to, they can drink and they won’t think any more about . . .” The noun rendered **their poverty** is found only in Proverbs;

for comments on its meaning, see 6.11. Since **poverty** does not quite seem to fit what is described in verse 6, NJB renders the term “misfortune” in this context. **And remember their misery no more: Remember . . . no more** has the same sense as **forget** in the previous line, and **misery** is the matching term for **poverty**. **Misery** renders a Hebrew word that basically means “labor” or “toil,” but which often has the sense of “trouble” (REB) or “suffering.” TEV translates “unhappiness” and CEV “how . . . miserable they feel.”

**Harper’s Bible Commentary:** On the other hand, when all hope is gone, strong drink may act as a palliative (31:6–7). The Talmud records that compassionate women in Jerusalem used to offer drugged wine to condemned prisoners to minimize their sufferings (so the note to Luke 23:27 in JB). The wine that Jesus refuses in Matt. 27:34 (cf. Luke 23:27; Mark 15:23; John 19:28–30) was probably meant for this purpose.

**Jerome Biblical Commentary:** These lines occasioned the pious service Jerusalem women used to offer the condemned (cf. Mt 27:34).

**KJV Bible Commentary:** Wine should only be given to him that is ready to perish, for this represents an advantageous use of God’s gift. (cf. I Tim 5:23). The pious women of Jerusalem used to offer wine to those condemned to crucifixion in order to deaden their misery. This was offered to the Lord Jesus (Mt 27:34), but he refused it; for He wished to keep His mind clear to the last as He took upon himself the sins of all mankind.

**King James Version Study Bible:** If anyone drinks wine, it should be those who are perishing, to whom it will serve for medicinal purposes. Poverty (v. 7) can mean misery from sources other than simply financial need.

**MacArthur Study Bible:** Such extreme situations, possibly relating to a criminal on death row or someone agonizing in pain with a terminal illness or tragic circumstance, are in utter contrast to that of the king (cf. Ps. 104:15).

**Matthew Henry:** He must do good with his wealth. Great men must not think that they have their abundance only that out of it they may *made provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of it*, and may the more freely indulge their own genius; no, but that with it they may relieve such as are in distress, v. 6, 7. "Thou hast wine or strong drink at command; instead of doing thyself hurt with it, do others good with it; let those have it that need it." Those that have wherewithal must not only give bread to the hungry and water to the thirsty, but they must *give strong drink to him*



*that is ready to perish* through sickness or pain *and wine to those that are melancholy and of heavy heart*; for it was appointed to cheer and revive the spirits, and *make glad the heart* (as it does where there is need of it), not to burden and oppress the spirits, as it does where there is no need of it. We must deny ourselves in the gratifications of sense, that we may have to spare for the relief of the miseries of others, and be glad to see our superfluities and dainties better bestowed upon those whom they will be a real kindness to than upon ourselves whom they will be a real injury to. Let those that are *ready to perish* drink soberly, and it will be a means so to revive their drooping spirits that they will *forget their poverty* for the time *and remember their misery no more*, and so they will be the better able to bear it. The Jews say that upon this was grounded the practice of giving a stupifying drink to condemned prisoners when they were going to execution, as they did to our Saviour. But the scope of the place is to show that wine is a cordial, and therefore to be used for want and not for wantonness, by those only that need cordials, as Timothy, who is advised to *drink a little wine, only for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities*, 1 Tim. 5:23.

**Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary:** Wine is to be used for want or medicine. Every creature of God is good, and wine, though abused, has its use.

**Nelson's Old Testament Survey:** Being inebriated has value only for those who, about to die, want to forget their misery (31:6–7). This is no endorsement of insobriety but only an observation that strong drink has no value except in negative ways.

**NET Bible Notes:** 31:6 **sn** Wine and beer should be given to those distressed and dying in order to ease their suffering and help them forget. **tn** Heb “to the bitter of soul.” The phrase לְמַרִּי נַפְשִׁי (lémare nafesh) has been translated “of heavy hearts” (KJV); “in anguish” (NIV); “in misery” (TEV); “in bitter distress” (NRSV); “sorely depressed” (NAB); “in deep depression (NLT); “have lost all hope” (CEV). The word “bitter” (מַר, mar) describes the physical and mental/spiritual suffering as a result of affliction, grief, or suffering—these people are in emotional pain. So the idea of “bitterly distressed” works as well as any other translation. 31:7 **tn** The subjects and suffixes are singular (cf. KJV, ASV, NASB). Most other English versions render this as plural for stylistic reasons, in light of the preceding context. **tn** The king was not to “drink and forget”; the suffering are to “drink and forget.”

**New American Commentary:** The queen-mother does not recommend a free beer program for the poor or justify its use as an opiate for the masses; her point is simply that the king must avoid

drunkenness in order to reign properly. The comparison to the suffering poor and to their use of alcohol is meant to awaken Lemuel to the duties that go with his class and status rather than to describe some kind of permissible drunkenness.

**New Bible Commentary:** Lemuel is also to leave strong drink to people who need to drown their sorrows, because in his case it may make him neglect his royal obligation to the oppressed (4–7).

**Preacher’s Commentary:** Alcoholic beverages were to be viewed as remedies more than refreshments. They had a role in emergencies (vv. 6–7): to revive or comfort someone on the point of collapse (“*perishing*”) as did the brandy cask offered by St. Bernards to people trapped in Alpine avalanches or the shot of whiskey to aid the frontier cowboy who faced the pain of amputation; a flask of “*wine*” might ease the agony of those who had suffered intolerable financial reverses and were ruthlessly held in the grips of “*poverty*” with its grinding “*misery*” that came from toil that was grueling but fruitless (Hebrew *‘āmāl*; see 24:2; the word is common in Ecclesiastes, used six times in ch. 2 alone).

**Interpretation:** The drink should be reserved for the dying, those in great distress, and the poor, in order to ease their pain and to forget their misery.

**Pulpit Commentary:** Ver. 6.—There are cases where strong drink may be properly administered. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish (Job 29:13; 31:19). As a restorative, a cordial, or a medicine, wine may be advantageously used; it has a place in the providential economy of God. “Use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities,” was St. Paul’s advice to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23). It is supposed to have been in consideration of the injunction in the text that the ladies of Jerusalem provided for criminals on their way to the place of execution a drink of medicated wine, which might deaden the pain of suffering. Tins was the draught rejected by Christ, who willed to taste the full bitterness of death (Matt. 27:34; Mark 15:23). The Septuagint has, “to those that are in sorrow;” so the Vulgate, *mærentibus*, but this makes the two clauses tautological. Wine unto those that be of heavy hearts (Job 3:20). “Wine,” says the psalmist, “maketh glad the heart of man” (Ps. 104:15). Says Homer, ‘Iliad,’ vi. 261—“Great is the strength Which generous wine imparts to wearied men.” “Wine,” says St. Chrysostom (‘Hom. in Ephes.’ xix.), “has been given us for cheerfulness, not for drunkenness. Wouldest thou know where wine is good? Hear what the Scripture with, ‘Give wine to them, etc. And justly, because it can mitigate asperity and gloominess, and drive away clouds from the brow” (comp. Eccus. 31:25, etc.). Ver. 7.—Let him drink, and forget his poverty. . . . Thus is shown a way in which the rich can comfort

and encourage their poorer brethren, which is a better method of using God's good gifts than by expending them on their own selfish enjoyment.

**Reformation Study Bible:** While the king must avoid using strong drink as a means of escape from the concerns of high office, it may be given to those whose suffering is too much to bear.

**Thru the Bible:** She tells Solomon to use wine for medicine.

**Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary:** Proverbs 31:6–7 does not advocate intoxication, but it simply reflects the medicinal use of wine in ancient times, much like a tranquilizer would be prescribed today.

**Word Biblical Commentary:** The emphasis on royal justice is followed by a rather bold and singular recommendation. Instead of enjoying personal consumption of the royal cellar, the king is to provide a supply of drink for the unfortunate people who need it as a kind of comfort (?) for their misery. This strange command has provoked several hypotheses. On the one hand, it has been considered to be “cynical” and perhaps a later addition; as noted in *Note 5.a.*<sup>2</sup>, the command is in the plural. On the other hand, it has been interpreted as providing some relief for the unfortunate. What is to be, as it were, doled out to kings is to be provided generously for afflicted members of the realm, whose comforts are little enough. Even though this can be only a temporary measure, a kind of ancient opium (as well as modern?), it is nonetheless recommended. But it is also clear that this does not excuse the king from positive action in favor of lesser people.

**Wycliffe Bible Commentary:** As mentioned at 23:31, this is not an allowance of moderate drinking, as Fritsch suggests, nor cynical advice (Oesterley). It may recommend alcohol as a drug (Toy). Delitzsch mentions the wine offered at executions by the noble women at Jerusalem on the basis of this verse (cf. Mk 15:23). More likely, however, the verse is a comparative negative (cf. 8:10): Regardless of others, you should not take it. Wine, women, and song are the old debasing trio. A king has a higher responsibility, for which see verses 8, 9.

## OTHER SOURCES

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<sup>2</sup> There is a change from plural to singular verb forms, but the plural appears in the imperative in v 6; “kings” may be taken as a collective here. The verbs appear in the plural in the [LXX](#).

**Norman L. Geisler:** “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter” (Prov 31:6). This indicates that strong drink was used as a sedative or pain-killer for the dying, and that wine was also used to calm the nerves of those who were deeply bereaved or in deep distress. Norman L. Geisler, “A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:553 (January 1982): 48.

**J. Kerby Anderson:** In a patient’s last days, everything possible should be done to alleviate physical and emotional pain. Giving drugs to a patient to relieve pain is morally justifiable. Proverbs 31:6 says, “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter.” As previously mentioned, some analgesics have the secondary effect of shortening life. But these should be permitted since the primary purpose is to relieve pain, even though they may secondarily shorten life.

Moreover, believers should provide counsel and spiritual care to dying patients (Gal 6:2). Frequently emotional needs can be met both in the patient and in the family. Such times of grief also provide opportunities for witnessing. Those suffering loss are often more open to the gospel than at any other time.

Difficult philosophical and biblical questions are certain to continue swirling around the issue of euthanasia. But in the midst of these confusing issues should be the objective, absolute standards of Scripture, which provide guidance for the hard choices of providing care to terminally ill patients. J. Kerby Anderson, “Euthanasia: A Biblical Appraisal,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144:574 (April 1987): 217.

**Jay E. Adams:** Christian pastors must begin to instruct members of their congregations to insist upon changes. Medical personnel often have claimed rights and prerogatives at this point that do not belong to them. Christian families must begin to stand up and be counted concerning such matters as the insatiable prolonging of life under vegetative and totally artificial conditions when its maintenance is merely mechanical. They also must begin to require physicians and hospitals to tell the truth to the patient. They should insist upon the use of medication that will permit the patient to function with mental clarity so long as he desires in order to speak with God, his wife, family, minister, and friends.<sup>3</sup> Physicians must be told that pain is not the only evil, and that it must not always become the principal target for attack, taking precedence over all else. Moreover, medication exists today that, in most cases, will relieve a patient of pain without surrendering consciousness. Jay E. Adams,

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<sup>3</sup> It is true that there may come a time when the words of Proverbs 31:6, 7 become pertinent. But Christ’s rejection of such an anesthetic potion (Mark 15:23) in order to retain full consciousness and sensibility during his unique and incomparable task shows clearly the secondary rather than primal concern over pain.

“Questions Concerning Pastoral Visitation of the Dying,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 36:2 (Winter 1974): 212.

**Martin Luther:** But here one must also note that it was common practice for the saintly fathers to feast together; for Abraham undoubtedly invited to this feast Shem—that is, Melchizedek<sup>4</sup>—the king and priest, with his household, likewise other fathers, and provided rather sumptuous fare. For Moses does not state without a purpose that Abraham provided a great feast. Therefore the saints may also refresh themselves physically, especially when they are burdened by sadness and misfortune, just as Scripture states (Prov. 31:6): “Give wine to those in bitter distress.” Likewise Ps. 104:15: “Wine gladdens the heart.” It should be the purpose of feasts to gladden hearts and to refresh them after sadness. For God dislikes sadness. When hearts are burdened with it, they cannot praise or give thanks. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 21–25*, vol. 4 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 4:15.

**John S. and Paul D. Feinberg:** Finally, what about biblical teaching to extend mercy to those in need? Many reply that mercy to the sick and dying does not include granting their wish to die. However, it does include proper care for their needs. Proper care involves giving drugs to relieve pain. Kerby Anderson appeals to Prov 31:6 as a moral justification for giving pain-relieving drugs. He also cites Gal 6:2 to urge believers to provide counsel and spiritual care for dying patients. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 118.

**Gregory of Nyssa:** Moreover console each other with the following words; it is a good medicine that Solomon<sup>5</sup> has for sorrow; for he bids wine be given to the sorrowful; saying this to us, the labourers in the vineyard: “Give,” therefore, “your wine to those that are in sorrow,”<sup>6</sup> not that wine which produces drunkenness, plots against the senses, and destroys the body, but such as gladdens the heart, the wine which the Prophet recommends when he says: “Wine maketh glad the heart of man.”<sup>7</sup> Pledge each other in that liquor undiluted<sup>8</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup> Luther identified Melchizedek with Shem, the son of Noah; cf. Luther’s Works, 2, p. 882.

<sup>5</sup> It is only the Rabbis that make Lemuel, the author of the last chapter of Proverbs, the same as Solomon: Grotius identifies him with Hezekiah. Some German commentators regard him as the chief of an Arab tribe, on the borders of Palestine, and brother of Agur, author of ch. xxx. But the suggestion of Eichhorn and Ewald is the more probable, that Lemuel is an ideal name signifying “for God,” the true King who leads a life consecrated to Jehovah.

<sup>6</sup> Prov. xxxi. 6. Just above προς ημας is the reading of Krabinger’s MSS. and of the Paris Edit.: Sifanus and Ducaeus have rendered υμας.

<sup>7</sup> S. Gregory has misapplied both this passage from Ps. civ. 15 and the previous one from Prov. xxxi. 6. An attentive consideration of them shows that they do not lend themselves to the use he has made of them.

<sup>8</sup> Ζωροτερω. For the comparative see Lobeck, *Ad Phrynich.* p. 146: μειζοτερω is the common faulty reading. These words are joined closely to what precedes in the MSS. Then, in what follows, “the unstinted goblets of the word,” πνευματικου is rightly omitted before λογου: “and gladness” (και αγαλλιασις) is rightly added, as it is joined with ευφροσυνη in Ps. xlv. 15; and by Gregory himself, *In Diem Nat. Christ.* (pp. 340 and 352), and *In Bapt. Christi* (p. 377).

with the unstinted goblets of the word, that thus our grief may be turned to joy and gladness, by the grace of the Only-begotten Son of God, through Whom be glory to God, even the Father, for ever and ever. Amen. Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. V, Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, Etc.* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 517.

**Chrysostom:** Wouldest thou know where wine is good? Hear what the Scripture saith, “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul.” (Prov. xxxi. 6.) And justly, because it can mitigate asperity and gloominess, and drive away clouds from the brow. “Wine maketh glad the heart of man” (Ps. civ. 15), says the Psalmist. How then does wine produce drunkenness? For it cannot be that one and the same thing should work opposite effects. Drunkenness then surely does not arise from wine, but from intemperance. Wine is bestowed upon us for no other purpose than for bodily health; but this purpose also is thwarted by immoderate use. But hear moreover what our blessed Apostle writes and says to Timothy, “Use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake, and thine often infirmities.” Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. XIII, Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 138.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

### FURTHER STUDY

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “[The Gospel Cordial](#),” Text: Proverbs 31:6–7, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons Volume 5*, September 20, 1863.