

*EPIC FAILURE*  
*AND*  
*HOW YOU CAN AVOID IT*

ALIVE MINISTRIES  
STUDENT CONFERENCE

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## THE PATH OF EPIC FAILURE

It must have been cool – way cool – to be an Israelite warrior back when Israel began to fight for the land that God had given them. Certainly this was better than the forty years they had been going ‘round and ‘round in circles in the wilderness. Nothing but sand. And heat. And more sand and heat. “Daddy, didn’t we pass that mountain three years ago?!” “Yes son, we did. And three years before that, and....” Talk about dulls-ville!

But not anymore! Finally all those years of God’s punishment were over and the Israelites had a second chance to enter their promised land. “Do you think we ought to go in and fight for the land this time?” someone may have asked. “Well, duh! You want to spend another forty years with sand between your toes?!”

Achan was one of the Israelite warriors that went in to conquer the land of Canaan. We don’t know much about Achan, but we do know what he saw in Canaan was a lot better than what he’d seen all those years in the dessert. And we also know that Achan became the poster boy for epic failure. Let’s look at – and learn from – the steps that lead this warrior down the path of failure (Joshua 7:20-21).

Step 1: I Saw. The first battle for the Israelites was against the city of Jericho. Once he was inside the city Achan saw a large amount of money (silver and gold worth about \$30,000 today). He also saw an awesome suit – which sure looked a lot better than this same old robe that he’d been wearing the last forty years.

Step 2: I Desired. Achan likely couldn’t help that he first saw the money and the clothes, but it *was* his choice to move on to the next step – to desire (covet, yearn for) what God said was off limits. And in choosing to desire those he also chose to sin..., and to begin down the path to epic failure. Like the rest of us, Achan had to decide if he would ignore temptation, or if he would allow himself to dwell on wanting what he had been tempted with – and he chose to desire it. He found out too late that he made the wrong choice – a choice that would ultimately mean his own death and the death of all his family.

Step 3: I Took. We don’t always know how long it takes to go from step 2 to step 3, but in Achan’s case it probably didn’t take but a few seconds. Sometimes it can be much longer – weeks or even years. But after allowing himself to desire the gold, silver, and the robe, Achan then took the next step toward epic failure and actually took them.

In the cities that the Israelites conquered God allowed them to take the spoils they found – except for this first battle. Here God said that the spoils were off limits – they belonged to Him. But Achan ignored the limits that God set – and epic failure soon followed.

Step 4: I Hid. After taking this stuff that God said was off limits, Achan took the next and final step of his epic failure – he took it home and placed (*hid*) them among his own possessions. And it seems that he may have showed them to his family also, making them accessories-after-the-fact in the sin that he had done. Then a few days later when his sin was discovered – after that sin had caused the death of thirty-six of his fellow warriors – Achan and his whole family were stoned to death as punishment for their sin and the deaths it had caused.

How can we avoid being an epic failure when it comes to temptation? Well, we simply need to learn from Achan’s mistake:

First, realize that it is not a sin to be tempted. Temptation is Satan trying to convince us to do something that the Bible says is wrong. Like Achan, we might be tempted when we see something pleasing, but just seeing it and being tempted by it is not sin. If you see something in the store and you are tempted to take it without paying for it, or if you’re tempted to “take” someone else’s answer on a test and copy it, being tempted doesn’t mean you’ve sinned.

But Achan quickly moved from *I saw* to *I desired*. When we’re faced with temptation we have basically two choices: say “no” and chase it away, or say “yes” by letting that desire stay in our mind. The Bible says “flee from youthful lusts,” which means that when we are tempted we don’t stick around thinking about it or dreaming about what it would feel like to do it – we chase it out of our mind or

walk away from it. Even just letting the temptation stay in our thinking for a while shows that we are saying “yes” to it – that we choose to *desire* it. When we do this, we have crossed over into sin, and are walking the path to failure.

If we let wrong desires hang around, eventually we’ll be looking at the next step – the temptation to actually *take* or do what is wrong. If you allow your mind to dream about doing wrong, before too long Satan will be pushing you to actually do those things. When you give in to that, you’re taking the third step towards your own epic failure.

*I took* leads to *I hid*. In other words, once you have gone from desiring sin to actually doing it, it’s very easy to take that sin and make it a part of your normal routine.

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Does your life have some epic failures? ...Or maybe you realize that you’re on the road to one? Take a few minutes to think about the sins that you struggle with. How far down the path of epic failure are you with each of them? Which of them are just temptations, but nothing more? (Don’t let Satan tell you that you’ve sinned because you’ve been tempted. Remember, Jesus was tempted, too – and He *never* sinned.) Are there some things that the Bible clearly says is off limits, but that you allow yourself to dream about – to enjoy thinking about doing? If so, you’ve crossed over into sinful *desire* – what the Bible sometimes calls coveting or lust. Have you gone further, and actually *taken* part in doing the sin, or even *hidden* it in the routines of your life? If so, epic failure is just around the corner. In order to avoid it, you need to turn your back on those sins and ask God’s forgiveness.

## EPIC FAILURE #2: BEING DISHONEST WITH GOD

### The Computer Crash – A Play

#### Scene 1 – Ani and Gem’s home. Enter Ani, stage right.

Ani: Hey Gem.... You’ll never guess how much the guy paid me for that box of old computer stuff! That stuff’s been around since my dad was growing up, and the thing won’t even play decent video games. Still the dude gave me \$2,000! Said something about it being a vintage first edition Apple or something. And I was just hoping to get \$25 for it!

Gem: WOW! That is great! Now I can get a new smart phone, you can get an iPad, I can get some clothes, and.....

Ani: Yeah, I was thinking about all that, too. But there’s a little problem. Like that commitment we made at church to give the money from selling the old computer stuff to help the homeless!

Gem: Yeah..., but when we made that promise we didn’t know what the computer was worth. It was just an old piece of junk that had been in the back closet for years! I didn’t commit to giving away two thousand dollars!

Ani: Well, like what can we do? I’m not telling the preacher that we’re giving \$25 even though it sold for two grand.

Gem: That’s it! We won’t tell him that it sold for two grand. We’ll tell him that it only sold for the \$25. Trust me, it’ll work.

#### Scene 2 – Sunday At First Church

Pastor: Good morning, Ani. How are you? Where’s Gem?

Ani: Good morning, pastor. She had to give something to the youth pastor. She’ll be here in a minute.

Hey, we finally sold that old computer stuff this week. It took some doing, but I talked the guy into giving me twenty-five bucks for that old stuff. Here’s the money he gave me as our contribution to the homeless fund.

Pastor: Thank you, Ani. But I happen to know that you got a lot more for the computer than \$25. Hey, the money was yours to decide what to do with it, to keep whatever you wanted of it, and to donate whatever you wanted to. But when you come in here lying about it, you know you're really lying to God.

*An expression of guilt and panic come across Ani's face, then he passes out on the floor. A couple of ushers pick him up and take him to the pastor's office. A few minutes later Gem walks in.*

Gem: Hey, Pastor. Has Ani come through? He has a check to give you for the homeless shelter. We sure were lucky to find someone to pay us \$25 for that old computer stuff.

Pastor: Hello, Gem. Yes, Ani has been here, and he's given me the check. But there's a little problem. Ani passed out when he found out that I knew that the computer stuff sold for a lot more than \$25. And now I see that the two of you worked this scheme out together – and that *both* of you are lying to God.

*The ushers come back in from the pastor's office just in time to see Gem's expression of guilt and panic..., and she passes out on the floor, just like Ani did. They take her to the pastor's office and place her next to Ani.*

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This play is a modernized version of Ananias and Sapphira's story – a real-life epic failure of two people who schemed together to lie to the preacher. Read the story in Acts 5:1-11, then answer these questions:

What person did they tell their lie to? \_\_\_\_\_

But who did Peter say that they were really lying to? \_\_\_\_\_

What happened to them because they lied to God? \_\_\_\_\_

Can you relate to some of this? Are there things that you are being less than honest with God about? Are you pretending to be one thing at church when, in fact, that isn't the real you? Who are you really lying to?

Jesus said that for those that really follow Him, "The truth will set you free." So, either we commit to knowing and living by the truth in the Bible, or we become enslaved by the lies all around us. Truth..., or epic failure – which will you choose?

### EPIC FAILURE #3: BAD RELATIONSHIPS

Another place that we're prone to epic failure is our relationships – and especially in our desire to find a person that we feel is special, and that makes us feel special and feel excited to be with them.

Read Proverbs 7:6-27. It is a story about a man who thought he had found someone special and exciting but found out too late that he had taken the path of epic failure. Sadly, there were several red flags that this man failed to heed. Let's notice some of them:

When and where they met (v9, 12). Back in Bible days the evening and especially late into the night was not a time when regular, reputable folks were out and about, walking the streets.<sup>1</sup> This was not the time or place to normally meet good people. The lesson for today is this: If you're not looking for a shady friend, then you probably shouldn't be looking at times and places where shady people hang out.

The clothes they wear. Did you know that very often a person's clothes are a reflection of what is going in their heart? Why? ...because it was the heart of the person that chose to wear those clothes in the first place. The Bible particularly mentions the need for girls to dress modestly..., but we don't see much of it today. Like the old preacher said, "Girls, if you've put your merchandise out on display then don't act surprised when the boys treat you like you got something to sell."

This dude in the story should have guessed that the girl was trouble because, as the Bible says, she was "dressed like a prostitute." That simply means that she was dressed in a way that would create a *desire* (remember that word?) for something that God said was off limits. Girls – and guys, too – do you dress in a way that

tempts others to desire what is off limits? “Well, he shouldn’t be thinking that way!” some might say. That is probably true..., but it’s not the *whole* truth because you are equally guilty if you dress in a way to provoke those desires. If God says your body is off limits to someone else you shouldn’t be revealing it to them – either by not covering yourself, or by clothes that are so tight they show what you got.

The attitude (v11). The Bible describes this girl’s attitude as “boisterous and rebellious (or stubborn).” This is a far cry from the gentle and quiet spirit that God expects women to have (1Peter 3:4). A person’s attitude says a lot about what is really going on inside their heart. What do the attitudes of your friends say about them and their desire to be what God wants them to be?

Girls, did you know that a good way to tell how a guy will treat his wife is the attitude he has toward his mother? Guys, did you know that the same is true in a girl’s attitude about her dad? “Oh, but you don’t know how bad he disrespects her,” someone might argue. But the truth is, one day she’ll likely think her husband disrespects her the same way..., and she’ll likely have this same attitude towards him when she does.

Temptation (v16-18). Another red flag was the pressure that this woman put on the guy to give in to temptation. A good friend – the kind of person that will make a good relationship – is one that will try to build you up..., not try to cut you down my tempting you to do what is wrong.

Disrespect for God’s way.... In verse 19 we find out that this woman has a husband. Her attempt to cheat on him is a total disrespect toward him. It is also a total disrespect toward God and His way.

Think of this: If someone will leave or cheat on the one that they are committed to in order to be with you..., don’t you think that they could just as easily do the same thing to you later when they find someone else they are attracted to?

...While pretending that she respects God(v14). This girl is a smooth talker..., pretending to be far more godly than she really is. “I’ve just been to God’s house and worshipped Him,” she says, but her actions show that she doesn’t really honor Him.

A good friend is one that will hold God as the most important thing in their lives, and encourage you to do the same. Their honoring God is real, not just words to trick others with. Just because someone is talking the talk, don’t assume that it is real. Give the relationship time, and in time you’ll see if they’re really walking the walk.

Quick decisions (v22). You’ve seen TV commercials that try to put pressure on you to make a quick decision to buy something by saying, “Call in the next 10 minutes...” or you’ll lose a great deal. Why the pressure to act so fast? Many times the high pressure gimmick is to get you to buy what you really don’t want or need, and the pitchman knows that if you think about it long you might see that it isn’t the wise thing to do.

Relationships are often the same way. We have to be careful about making commitments too fast. If the other person is putting pressure on you to decide too fast, or even if you’re feeling the pressure within yourself to make a hasty decision, then there’s a good chance that there is more going on than meets the eye. A decision doesn’t have to take weeks or months to be right, but when there is pressure to make a hasty relationship decision it’s probably time to slow down and think about it a while.

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So, how are you doing on your relationships? Is your history spotted with a lot of bad ones? Maybe you need to watch for the red flags that Proverbs 7 tells about. Do you have a boyfriend or girlfriend tempting you, or pressuring you to make a quick decision or to do what dishonors God? Red flags. Ask God for His guidance, and learn to recognize the red flags so that you can minimize the chances of being an epic failure in relationships.

#### EPIC FAILURE #4: SUBSTANCE ABUSE

How crazy does a person have to be to play Russian roulette? To put a bullet in a revolver, spin the cylinder of the gun, and take a 1-in-6 chance that the gun will shoot and end their life. Someone might say, “But hey, they have a much greater chance of *not* killing themselves.” That may be so, but the price that they pay if the gun does fire makes it a very, very dumb move – even if the odds were one-in-ten, or even one-in-a-hundred.

Yet people take that kind of risk all the time – but using a bottle or a can instead of a revolver. Did you know that when a person takes their first drink of alcohol (including beer) they are taking the same kind of chance? One out of every nine people who take their first drink will become an alcoholic<sup>2</sup> and ruin their life. To take your first drink is about as insane as playing Russian roulette.

But even if a person is willing to take that kind of risk, the Bible says don’t do it. To start drinking or doing drugs is another road to epic failure.

“The Bible doesn’t say anything about drugs. Besides those people in the Bible drank wine,” someone may say. Well, let’s see what the Bible does say about all of this.

Read Ephesians 5:18, and fill in the blank: “Do not be \_\_\_\_\_ with wine....” So, right off the bat we can agree that the Bible says to not be intoxicated, right?

Read Proverbs 23:29-35. This is a pretty gross description of what drinking “wine and mixed drinks” will do to a person. The wise man says that it’s like letting a poisonous snake bite you, and it makes you feel like barfing up your guts with the worst case of seasickness you can imagine. So, we can also agree that the Bible says to leave the “hard stuff” alone, right?

But what exactly is the “hard stuff”? Does it mean wine or gin or bourbon or scotch or moonshine, or what? Good question..., and you might be surprised at the answer. Did you know that it wasn’t until the 12<sup>th</sup> century – over a thousand years after Bible times –that the

process for making what we call “hard liquors” was discovered?<sup>3</sup> Before that alcohol was limited to what happens by natural fermentation – which means the “hard stuff” the Bible talks about was what we would call wine today. And as we all just agreed, the Bible condemns the use of that. So, anything that is as strong or stronger than wine is definitely off limits.

“But wait!” someone objects. “The Bible talks about people drinking wine. And Jesus Himself made wine, so that means it’s okay!” Well, yes, and no. We can be sure that Jesus never did anything wrong, and that if He did something it must be okay. But what exactly did Jesus make?

Some of the words translated “wine” in the Bible, including the wine that Jesus made from water, can mean either fermented wine or unfermented grape juice.<sup>4</sup> That juice would be stored after the yearly grape harvest, and in time some might naturally ferment some. But here is the kicker: The Jews did not drink this wine full strength; instead, they would mix it with water.<sup>5</sup> To drink wine full-strength was considered “barbaric.”<sup>6</sup> Probably depending on how strong the wine was and how much water might have evaporated out of it, it was mixed one part wine with from three to twenty parts water. So, it is very possible that the wine that Jesus made and that He drank might not have had any alcohol in it in the first place. And if it did, it was so watered down before anyone drank it that it had virtually no alcoholic content at all. So, looks like we can’t use Jesus’ actions as an excuse to drink.

But does the Bible condemn drugs, too? Not directly, but it does indirectly. First, the Bible says that we’re to follow our government laws and leaders (except when they disagree with the clear teachings of the Bible). This means that God expects us to avoid illegal drugs and the illegal use of prescription drugs.

Second, the Bible principles that apply to alcohol also apply to drugs. See, alcohol comes from taking something (such as grapes) and using it as an intoxicant. When we use anything else in the same way – such as drugs, or aerosol fumes – to get high, we’re breaking the same instructions that tell us to avoid alcohol.

So, does that mean that we can't even take prescription and over-the-counter drugs as medicine? No, it doesn't. The Bible makes an exception for alcohol (and therefore drugs) for real medical needs. Paul told Timothy to take a little wine to help with his stomach problems – and the context makes it sound like this was possibly fermented wine. Proverbs 31:6 talks of using wine as medication for the dying and those dealing with extreme problems (maybe emotional issues?). So, it's not wrong to use drugs for legitimate medical needs.

An alcoholic or a drug addict doesn't normally start out addicted. Usually they start with just the *desire* of thinking about drinking their first beer, smoking their first joint, or shooting up the first time. Eventually that desire gives way to, "Well, I'll just try it one time" – the *I took* step of epic failure. But not long afterward they find that they have already *hidden* it in the routines of lives.

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One out of every nine people who drink alcohol at all becomes an alcoholic. Compare that to another very important statistic: *nine* out of nine people who never drink never become alcoholics. You can't become an alcoholic or drug addict if you never start.

People often drink or do drugs to either be accepted by their friends, or to deaden the pains of life. Realize that Jesus loves you just as you are – unlike your so-called friends that require you to conform to their way of living before they will accept you. Also realize that God doesn't deaden our pain; instead, He removes our pain or helps us to grow through the pain – if we own up to the pain and give it to Him.

### **EPIC FAILURE #5: SEX, LIES AND COVER-UPS**

The people in the world around us seem to always be changing their opinions of most everything. The most popular styles of clothes, the newest gadgets, and even the "cool words" of today are so un-cool just months later.

Society also continually changes its views of what is right and wrong. In the 50's (and before) most everyone knew that sex before marriage was wrong, but in the 60's society said that it was okay. In the 60's everyone knew that abortion was wrong, but in the early 70's society decided that there was nothing wrong with it. In the 70's we knew that homosexuality was wrong, but since the 80's society is trying to change our opinion on that as well. It's like there has been a downward spiral as the world around us constantly tells us that the things that we know are wrong are not so wrong after all.

You might be surprised that some two thousand years ago Paul listed several sins we see today that are a part of this kind of "downward spiral" that people and societies go through as they turn their backs on God. Read about this downward spiral in Romans 1:18-32. Write down some of the sins we see and hear about today, especially those in v26-27: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Just like Paul said, one of the world's biggest pushes today is to convince us that it's okay to be gay – that God is cool with same-sex dating and marriage. The Bible tells about two cities – Sodom and Gomorrah – which were notorious for their acceptance of the gay lifestyle. What does Genesis 18:20 say that God thought of what they were doing? \_\_\_\_\_ Some people try to downplay this, and even say God was only angry at these cities because they lacked hospitality. You be the judge: what does Jude 1:7 say that these cities were punished for? \_\_\_\_\_ Does that sound like a lack of hospitality to you? Sodom and Gomorrah were epic failures because the people there *took* and *hid* homosexuality into their lives.

The Bible tells of another epic failure in the area of sex. The man's name was David, and 2Samuel 11:1-15 tells what happened to him. Read these verses and describe when David reached each of the steps of epic failure:

1. I Saw: \_\_\_\_\_
2. I Desired: \_\_\_\_\_
3. I Took: \_\_\_\_\_
4. I Hid: \_\_\_\_\_

Some people say David should have been out fighting instead of staying in the palace, and that’s what caused the problem. I’m not so sure that is right, or that it is the point that the Bible intends to make here. But what is clear is that, like Achan, David’s failure began when he allowed himself to dwell on desiring what he saw. It wasn’t a sin for David to accidentally see something, but it became a sin when he allowed himself to continue to desire what God said was off limits to him.

David slept with this woman, Bathsheba, who he *desired* and *took*. Some time later she sent word to David that she was pregnant. David tried to cover the scandal up, first by trying to trick her husband, and when that didn’t work David had him killed.

Did you know that this kind of stuff still happens today – probably even among some of the people that you go to school with? Of course you know that some of them are “sleeping together,” even though God says that sex is off limits if the people are not married to each other (1Corinthians 6:18). But did you know that, like David, many are hiding their sin by murder? It’s called abortion.

God sent a preacher to David to tell him that God knew about his sin, and was not happy. With a broken heart, David admitted his sin to God and asked for forgiveness. Psalm 51 is a song by David that tells how he felt when he was living in sin. Later he wrote Psalm 32 that shows how he felt after God had forgiven him.

The cool thing is that God can make the same thing happen to people today who have failed. Like David, if we admit to God that what we did was wrong, if we genuinely want to turn away from those sins, and if we ask God to forgive us then God will take away our guilt.

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How are you doing with your sexual temptations? Are you heading down the road of epic failure? Remember that being tempted is not a sin. But if you are allowing yourself to dwell on and enjoy temptation for something that the Bible says is off limits for you right now, that probably indicates that you’ve moved from *I Saw* to *I Desired*. There is nothing wrong with sex itself – God created sex and built that drive within us. But Satan tempts us to ignore God’s limits – to dwell on getting right now what God tells us to wait for, or to get what God simply says “No” about. Maybe you’ve moved further down the road towards failure, and have already *taken* or even *hidden* the things that God said to leave alone. Maybe, like David, you’ve also tried to cover up the sin..., even by abortion. If so, remember the lesson of David: Remember that God already knows what we’ve done; that when we’re broken hearted about our sins and willing to give them up, God is willing to forgive if we’ll ask Him. And once that happens, even though it may not take away all the consequences of our sin, we can once again know joy in our life as God intended.

**EPIC FAILURE #6: THE ULTIMATE EPIC FAILURE**

The two men could hardly have been more different. Read Luke 16:19-21 and list how the two men were different from each other:

<u>Rich Man</u>	<u>Lazarus</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Which man would most people think was the success? \_\_\_\_\_

Which one would they think was the failure? \_\_\_\_\_

Now read the rest of the story (Luke 16:22-31). Which man was the real success, and which was the epic failure?

People judge the success of others by many different things. Sometimes we give the highest scores to the most popular, those that have the most money, the best looking, the smartest, the most athletic..., and on and on it goes. But when it comes to how successful God thinks we are, it is very simple. He measures us by two things: How much we love God (first priority), and how much we love others (second priority). And the most important part of loving God is accepting His Son, Jesus, as our Savior when God stirs our heart. If we fail to do that, we're the biggest epic failures of all.

Accepting Jesus as Savior is as simple as ABC:

**A – Admit** (to yourself and to God) that you have sinned – that is, that you've done things that the Bible says is wrong. Like Achan found out, sin is the path to epic failure. Every one of us has sinned, and that sin leads us to the same result that Achan got – death (Romans 3:23, 6:23).

**B – Believe** what the Bible tells us about Jesus. Specifically that means that we genuinely believe that Jesus was the Son of God, that He died on the cross so that we can be free from the epic failure of sin and be able to go to heaven.

**C – Commit.** Simply pray to God, and if you really mean it ask Him to forgive your sins, ask Jesus to save you, and commit your heart and life to Him.

If God has stirred your heart to be saved, and you have genuinely believed these things and told them to God in prayer, then here is God's promise to you: "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

As a new Christian you need to talk regularly with God in prayer, read your Bible to hear what God has to say to you, and regularly attend a good, Bible-believing church. You also need to talk to your pastor about being baptized. This is the beginning of an

exciting life for you – of turning in a life of epic failure for a life of epic greatness!

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Hello, my name is Don Burke. I am a pastor and I wrote the devotionals in this booklet. If you've made the decision to accept Jesus as your Savior after reading these devotionals or while attending the ALIVE conference this year, I would really love to hear from you. You can share your good news by sending me an email to PotosiPastor@gmail.com.

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Gower and Fred Wight, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 48.

<sup>2</sup> Tabulated from information in: Statistic, National Center for Health. *Health, United States, 2007 with Chartbook on Trends in the Health of Americans*: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001. [accessed December 8, 2010].

<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distilled\\_beverage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distilled_beverage), accessed 12/11/2010.

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 235-37.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.