

**TO DRINK OR
NOT TO DRINK?**

To Drink or Not to Drink?

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It had been a long evening. What had started out as a real privilege had turned into a real disaster. John had already insulted and upset the Professor by refusing the aperitif, the wine, and the beer. Now, as they sat in the living room after the meal, Professor Piaget set a glass in front of John and began to pour the prized Brittany cider. Was it right for John to continue to anger, insult, and alienate his host—or would it be all right just this once to forget all that teaching in Bible College, forget his alcoholic father, forget what the Smiths would think and say, and drink a little cider, which did not contain much alcohol anyway?

John had spent the past two summers in France and now was enrolled at the University of Nantes. It was not an easy decision, but in obedience to what he felt to be the will of God, he returned in October and entered the beginning course in French. John had never studied French before. He found a room in the dormitory, hoping to make contacts with French students. He worked with the Smiths, who were starting a new church in Nantes. John had just graduated from a Bible College, a conservative school that took a strong stand against drinking alcoholic beverages. Besides, the Smiths had warned him about a few missionaries who had started drinking wine with the French and had later become alcoholics. John knew the suffering that alcoholism brought, because his father was an alcoholic.

One day John received an invitation to have dinner with his professor, along with three other foreign students. Professor Piaget had very graciously opened his home to them. John realized that it was a real privilege in France for French students to be invited to a professor's home, and an even greater honor for foreign students. When the night arrived for the dinner, the Smiths loaned John their car so that he could pick up his Japanese friend, Isao. The two students were excited as they arrived at the house. Little did John suspect that this would turn out to be such a problematic experience.

Dr. and Mrs. Piaget were very friendly and cordial. John spoke less French than any of the other students, but they had been very patient with him. After all the students arrived, Professor Piaget offered everyone an aperitif. Everyone accepted except John. He wanted to be a good witness for his Lord, so he refused. John thought the professor seemed ill at ease, because for a moment he appeared not to know what to do. After an uneasy silence he offered John some lemon drink and it was accepted. The awkwardness of the moment passed and John breathed a sigh of relief.

When dinner was served, John partook heartily of the beans and roast beef. But when Dr. Piaget began filling the guests' glasses with the customary wine, John politely refused his share. It was clear that this time the professor felt not only awkward but somewhat angry at this foreigner in his house who refused his hospitality. Though he offered John a Coke instead, the atmosphere had changed. Due to the length of French meals and the thirst of the people there, the host soon got more wine. Again it was only refused by John.

Dinner being finished, everyone sat around the table and discussed various subjects. Mrs. Piaget cleared the table of the last remains of dessert and coffee. It had been a great time for everyone except John and perhaps his host. John wondered, "Was it right to offend Professor Piaget the way I did? Was the Lord really pleased with what had taken place? Will I ever be able to share my faith in Christ with Dr. Piaget? Is it really so bad to drink just a little wine, and is it not worse to build a barrier between oneself and someone who does not know the Lord?" All these questions and more had run through John's mind throughout the meal and particularly now, when everyone was enjoying the conversation and relaxing.

It was then that Professor Piaget excused himself. He was gone for a few minutes but reappeared carrying a tray. On it was a large flask surrounded by neat-looking glasses. He began to tell his guests how good the Brittany cider was and, especially for John's benefit, that it contained only a little alcohol. The host set glasses in front of everyone and began to pour.

John became anxious as the professor moved closer. Should he refuse once again, even though the professor had pointed out for his sake that it contained little alcohol? Was he going to build an even-higher barrier between his teacher and himself? Or should he ignore the teachings of the Bible College and the warnings of the Smiths? When Professor Piaget paused before John and put a glass before him with a smile, John . . .