

**LOWERING** THE LEGAL DRINKING AGE: AN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN  
PERSPECTIVE ON REDUCING UNDERAGE ALCOHOL USE

A Paper

Submitted to Dr. Donna B. Peavey

of the

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Course

Human Growth and Development: CEEF 9403

in Discipleship and Ministry Leadership

Sarah K. Grunblatt

MPH, LSU Health Sciences Center - New Orleans, 2022

MS, University of New Orleans, 2020

MS, University of New Orleans, 2020

MEd, William Carey University, 2015

MEd, William Carey University, 2014

MA, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008

BS, Louisiana State University, 2007

October 1, 2023



## CONTENTS

### Section

I. Introduction.....	1
II. Biblical Principles and Personal Responsibility.....	2
III. Critique of the Existing Legal Drinking Age.....	3
IV. The Role of Family and Faith.....	4
V. Public Health and Education.....	5
VI. International Comparisons and Cultural Considerations.....	6
VII. Responding to Concerns.....	8
VIII. Conclusion.....	9

## **I. Introduction**

The legal drinking age in the United States has long been a subject of debate and contemplation, with divergent viewpoints on its implications for underage alcohol use. It is a matter that extends beyond legal regulations, delving into the heart of moral and ethical considerations, especially when seen through the lens of evangelical Christianity. This paper embarks on an exploration of the idea that lowering the legal drinking age from 21 resonates with evangelical Christian principles, emphasizing personal responsibility, individual choice, and the guidance of faith and family. Such an approach is posited as a more balanced and faith-rooted means of addressing the concerns surrounding underage alcohol use.

In today's society, the legal drinking age serves as a demarcation, segregating those who are deemed mature enough to make responsible choices about alcohol from those who are not. While this legal boundary is established with the intention of safeguarding young individuals, it brings to the forefront profound questions concerning the role of personal choice, individual responsibility, and the guidance of faith and family. Evangelical Christianity, a faith tradition that holds the Bible as its guiding light, places a strong emphasis on the significance of personal accountability and the freedom to make choices.

In the pages that follow, we will delve into the biblical principles and values that underpin the evangelical Christian perspective on personal responsibility and individual choice. By examining relevant biblical passages, we will see how this faith tradition emphasizes the importance of each person's decisions and the resulting consequences. We will also scrutinize the implications of adopting a lower legal drinking age, as seen through the eyes of evangelical Christianity, with an unwavering commitment to personal responsibility, individual choice, and the moral and spiritual guidance of faith and family. In so doing, we aim to offer a unique and

spiritually informed perspective on this contentious issue.

## **II. Biblical Principles and Personal Responsibility**

Personal responsibility and the concept of free will are foundational principles.

Evangelical Christians believe that individuals possess the God-given gift of free will, allowing them to make choices and be accountable for those choices. This concept is deeply rooted in the evangelical Christian worldview, reflecting the belief in God's design for humanity as moral agents with the capacity to choose between right and wrong. In this understanding, personal responsibility goes hand in hand with individual choice. Evangelical Christians recognize that their choices have moral and spiritual implications, and they are called to make responsible decisions in alignment with their faith and values. The Bible underscores the profound significance of these choices in the lives of believers and the moral fabric of society.

Deuteronomy 30:19 says "This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."<sup>1</sup> This passage highlights the pivotal role of personal choice and its consequences. It underscores that individuals are presented with options and are entrusted with the responsibility of making choices that lead to life and blessings. Furthermore, Galatians 6:7 says "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." This letter to the Galatians emphasizes the principle of individual accountability. It conveys the idea that individuals bear the consequences of their actions, a notion deeply embedded in the evangelical Christian understanding of personal responsibility. These biblical passages, among others,

---

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references will be from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

underscore the importance of personal responsibility, free will, and the accountability of one's choices in the evangelical Christian faith. These principles provide a solid foundation for the perspective that lowering the legal drinking age to 21 aligns with evangelical Christian values, as it places trust in the individual's capacity to make responsible choices and seeks to balance legal regulations with personal accountability.

### **III. Critique of the Existing Legal Drinking Age**

The existing legal drinking age of 21 in the United States has been implemented with the aim of reducing the negative consequences of underage alcohol use, particularly to protect young individuals from harm. However, from the perspective of evangelical Christianity, there are shortcomings associated with this age requirement that warrant careful consideration. One of the primary concerns is that a legal drinking age of 21, although well-intentioned, may not fully address the complex challenges surrounding alcohol use among young people. Proponents of a higher drinking age often emphasize public safety and the prevention of alcohol-related accidents as the primary rationale. While these concerns are valid, this approach tends to place greater trust in legal regulations and government intervention rather than emphasizing the moral and spiritual guidance that evangelical Christians hold dear.

There is a profound argument to be made against a higher legal drinking age. It is rooted in the belief that individuals, as moral agents with free will, should be entrusted with personal responsibility and the freedom to make choices, including those concerning alcohol consumption. The Bible consistently underscores the importance of individual choice and personal accountability. The passage from Deuteronomy 30:19, for instance, challenges individuals to make choices that lead to life and blessings. Similarly, Galatians 6:7 highlights that

individuals reap what they sow, reinforcing the idea that our choices have consequences. These biblical principles align with the notion that young adults aged 18 to 20 should be granted the opportunity to exercise their free will in a responsible manner.

Elevating the legal drinking age to 21 might inadvertently imply a lack of trust in the moral and spiritual capacity of young adults. It could be seen as an overreliance on legislation to control behavior rather than empowering individuals to make choices guided by faith, family values, and personal responsibility. In the pages that follow, we will further explore the role of faith and family in guiding individuals toward responsible choices concerning alcohol and offer a perspective on how lowering the legal drinking age can better align with the biblical principles cherished by evangelical Christians.

#### **IV. The Role of Family and Faith**

The family unit and faith communities play a pivotal role in shaping individual behavior and moral choices. These institutions are viewed as integral to the development of young individuals, providing them with guidance, support, and a foundation of faith-based values. The family, in particular, is considered the bedrock of moral and spiritual development. The Bible underscores the importance of parents teaching and guiding their children in faith and righteousness. Proverbs 22:6 states, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." This verse highlights the responsibility of parents in nurturing the moral compass of their children.

In the context of the legal drinking age, evangelical Christians argue that families and faith-based institutions are better equipped to guide young people in making responsible choices regarding alcohol. Lowering the drinking age to 18 aligns with this perspective, as it recognizes

the role of families and faith communities in imparting moral and spiritual values, which extend to decisions about alcohol consumption. Families can offer an environment of love, support, and moral guidance where young adults can learn about the potential risks and responsibilities associated with alcohol use. Faith communities provide a spiritual framework that emphasizes self-control, responsible decision-making, and adherence to biblical values.

By granting young adults the freedom to make choices about alcohol within the context of their faith and family values, evangelical Christians believe that personal responsibility is enhanced. This approach fosters a sense of accountability not only to legal regulations but, more importantly, to one's faith, family, and God. In the subsequent sections, we will delve into the significance of public health and education, explore international comparisons and cultural considerations, and respond to concerns about public safety. Through these discussions, we aim to present a comprehensive evangelical Christian perspective on the legal drinking age, emphasizing the roles of faith and family in guiding young individuals toward responsible choices.

## **V. Public Health and Education**

Public health and education are instrumental in fostering responsible behavior, including responsible drinking. While legal regulations have their place, the foundation of moral and responsible choices is laid through education and awareness campaigns. The Bible teaches the value of knowledge and wisdom in Proverbs 4:6-7, stating, "Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." Evangelical Christians advocate for the implementation of comprehensive alcohol education programs and awareness campaigns as



alternatives to legal restrictions. By equipping young individuals with knowledge about the potential risks and consequences of alcohol misuse, society empowers them to make informed, responsible choices.

Faith-based institutions and communities can play a vital role in delivering these educational programs, emphasizing the moral and spiritual dimensions of responsible behavior. These programs can provide a platform for discussing the biblical principles of self-control and personal accountability, as well as the importance of honoring one's body as a temple, as described in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 : "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." By promoting awareness of the moral and spiritual implications of alcohol use and by providing young adults with the knowledge and tools needed to make responsible choices, society can foster an environment where individuals are empowered to exercise their free will in alignment with their faith, values, and understanding. The evangelical Christian perspective suggests that this approach goes beyond mere legal regulations, fostering a sense of moral and spiritual responsibility that is at the core of faith-based living.

## **VI. International Comparisons and Cultural Considerations**

It is valuable to consider international comparisons of legal drinking ages and cultural differences. Different countries have varying approaches to regulating alcohol access, often influenced by their cultural and societal norms. For instance, in many European countries, the legal drinking age is 18 or even lower, and there is a cultural emphasis on responsible alcohol consumption and moderation. These international differences reflect the diverse ways that

societies approach the issue of alcohol use. It is essential to recognize that cultural factors can significantly impact how individuals view and use alcohol. The Bible acknowledges the existence of diverse cultural contexts and the need to adapt to different situations, as highlighted in 1 Corinthians 9:22 : "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."

The United States can learn from countries with lower legal drinking ages without experiencing disproportionate harm. Lowering the drinking age to 18 aligns with the idea of respecting individual choice and personal responsibility, while also recognizing the influence of cultural and societal norms. While there are legitimate concerns about the potential consequences of lowering the legal drinking age, it is important to consider that some countries with lower drinking ages have not experienced significantly higher rates of alcohol-related harm among young people. These countries have relied on a combination of factors, including cultural attitudes, comprehensive education, and effective regulations, to promote responsible drinking among young adults. The evangelical Christian perspective suggests that the U.S. can strike a balance by considering international models and cultural factors in shaping its approach to underage alcohol use. By focusing on education, awareness, and the moral and spiritual guidance provided by faith and family, the United States can move toward a more holistic and responsible way of addressing the concerns surrounding underage alcohol use. This approach acknowledges the diversity of cultural contexts and respects the principles of individual choice and personal responsibility, which are integral to the evangelical Christian perspective.

## **VII. Responding to Concerns**

It is essential to acknowledge and address concerns related to public safety and underage alcohol abuse. While advocating for a lower legal drinking age, we recognize the valid concerns regarding the potential for increased alcohol-related accidents and harm among young people. One of the foundational principles in addressing these concerns is the biblical value of loving one's neighbor and looking out for the well-being of others. In Matthew 22:39, Jesus teaches, "Love your neighbor as yourself." This principle underscores the need to take measures to protect the safety and health of young individuals and the broader community.

In response to these concerns, evangelical Christians propose alternative strategies that align with the principles of personal responsibility and individual choice. These strategies include implementing stricter penalties for those who furnish alcohol to minors and ensuring effective enforcement of existing regulations. By holding accountable those who provide alcohol to underage individuals, society can address the source of the problem more directly. This approach emphasizes individual responsibility and the consequences of one's actions, aligning with biblical principles. In addition, effective enforcement of existing laws can help curb underage alcohol abuse without raising the legal drinking age. The evangelical Christian perspective emphasizes that it is possible to strike a balance between personal freedom, individual responsibility, and public safety. By addressing concerns through targeted enforcement and penalties for those who enable underage drinking, society can mitigate the potential harm while still respecting the principles of personal choice and accountability.

## VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the perspective of evangelical Christianity offers a unique lens through which to examine the question of the legal drinking age in the United States. From this standpoint, the main arguments for lowering the drinking age are rooted in the principles of personal responsibility, individual choice, and the guidance of faith and family. The belief in the God-given gift of free will and the moral responsibility to make choices in alignment with faith and values underpin this perspective. Central to the evangelical Christian perspective is the recognition of the pivotal role of personal responsibility, the family unit, and faith communities in shaping individual behavior. As highlighted in the Bible, parents are entrusted with the responsibility to guide their children in the ways of faith and righteousness, and faith communities provide a spiritual framework for responsible decision-making. Moreover, comprehensive education and awareness programs are seen as essential tools to empower young individuals to make informed and responsible choices about alcohol.

In light of the biblical principles and values cherished by the evangelical Christian community, there is a call to reconsider the legal drinking age in the United States. Lowering the drinking age from 21 aligns with the principles of personal responsibility, individual choice, and the moral and spiritual guidance of faith and family. While concerns related to public safety and underage alcohol abuse are valid, the evangelical Christian perspective suggests that society can find a more balanced approach. By emphasizing the moral and spiritual dimensions of responsible behavior and by providing comprehensive education and guidance, young individuals can be empowered to make choices that reflect their faith and values. The evangelical Christian perspective offers a unique vantage point in the discourse on the legal drinking age, emphasizing the importance of personal choice and the values of faith and family. It is a

perspective that calls for a reevaluation of the current regulations, seeking a more holistic and spiritually informed approach to addressing concerns related to underage alcohol use.