

Alcohol and the Christian – What does the Bible say?

Background:

Alcohol is probably the oldest drug known to human beings. It was easy for primitive people to discover that fruits and juices, left to stand in a warm place, soon ferment into alcoholic mixtures.

Alcohol use changed radically in 700 A.D. when Arab chemists discovered out how to distill alcohol. This led to the ability to produce highly potent concentrations of alcohol (whiskey >40% alcohol). The wine and beer manufactured before the invention of distilling was relatively mild in its alcohol content.

1) Alcohol and Wisdom

Prov. 20:1 (NKJV) Wine (*yayin*) is a mocker, Strong drink (*shekar*) is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

a) **Wine (*yayin*)**

- i) Hebrew scholars say this is a generic word which can mean either intoxicating or non-intoxicating wine.
- ii) **Non-intoxicating** (Isa 16:10) – grapes being pressed are called wine (*yayin*) –in this case it does not mean fermented, but freshly squeezed grape juice.
- iii) **Intoxicating** (Genesis 9:20-21) “And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk.”
- iv) Wine is a **mocker** – it has no regard for authority and moral integrity.

b) **Wine (*tirosh*)**

- i) Refers to grape juice by referring to a cluster of grapes; always non-alcoholic except in Hosea 4:11.
- ii) 51 of the 52 times it is used, it means pure grape juice and consuming it is encouraged (Isaiah 65:8).

c) **Strong drink (*shekar*)**

- i) An “intoxicant,” an inebriating drink, whether the wine prepared or distilled is from barley, honey, or dates; *yayin* refers more particularly to wine made from grapes. (*The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*)
- ii) What we consider “strong drink” today did not exist back then.
- iii) Universally condemned in the Bible except as a “narcotic” for a dying person:

Prov. 31:6 (NKJV) Give strong drink (*shekar*) to him who is perishing, And wine (*yayin*) to those who are bitter (heavy) of heart.

- d) Alcohol leads away from wisdom; wisdom will lead away from drinking. They are contrary to one another.

2) Alcohol and leadership

- a) Kings and national leaders are to leave wine and strong drink alone: (**Prov. 31:4**)
- b) Religious leaders are to abstain from alcohol (**Isa. 28:7-8; 1 Timothy 3:2-3, 8; Titus 1:7**).

3) Alcohol and its effects

Proverbs 23:29-35 (NKJV) ²⁹ Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? ³⁰Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. ³¹Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; ³²At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. ³³Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things. ³⁴ Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: ³⁵ "They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"

- a) **Woe** (v. 29) – despair, hopelessness
- b) **Sorrow** (v. 29) – pain, anguish, distress
 - i) Causes people to lie
 - ii) Ruins marriages and becomes the direct cause of divorce
 - iii) Turns teens into rebels who ruin their lives
 - iv) Causes virtuous men and women to forsake their vows
 - v) Turns normally gentle/docile men into wife-beaters
 - vi) Causes obedient children to become disobedient and rebel against their parents
 - vii) Causes innocent children to be deprived
 - viii) Sends people to an early grave
- c) **Strife** (v. 29) – arguments (80% of domestic abuse is alcohol-related), hateful words, angry actions
- d) **Complaints** (v. 29) – problems and difficulties
- e) **Wounds** (v. 29) – bodily injuries
- f) **Bloodshot** (v. 29) redness of the eyes, dulled senses, weeping, mental anguish
- g) **Enticing** (v. 31)
- h) **Negative health affects** (v. 32)
 - i) The look of wine is enticing; however, its bite is like that of a serpent – poisonous, debilitating, and destructive.
- i) **Addiction** (vv. 33-35) - {what the advertisers don't tell us}
- j) **Impaired judgment** (v. 35)
 - i) While under the influence of alcohol, senses are dulled, leading people to believe they can act or react in ways they cannot, often to their own detriment.

4) **Alcohol and the New Testament:**

- a) **Wine** (*Grk. Oinos*)
 - i) *Oinos* is a generic term considered to mean unfermented unless the context indicates otherwise.
 - ii) The wine of Jesus day was not heavy wine even if it had fermented.

- (1) In a hot climate before the invention of refrigeration, it was not possible keep wine many months past the harvest before fermentation began.

 - (2) In the Roman world of the NT times, the best wines were those whose alcoholic potency had been removed by boiling or filtration.

 - iii) Yale University study – normal fermentation does not provide a sufficient alcohol content to bring on drunkenness. There must be a mechanical intervention with the normal process such as the addition of pure alcohol or other process of normal distillation. The Hebrews would refer to our wine and beer as “strong drink” which is condemned in the Bible. The fermentation process did not come about until the medieval days, therefore the drink of Jesus’ day was not the same as ours today – it is like comparing apples and oranges.

 - iv) According to 1st century history, wine consisted of mixing between 3-4 parts water with 1 part wine up to 10 parts water to 1 part wine. The water was not pure and this made it safe to drink.
- b) **Did Jesus turn water into wine or grape juice (John 2:1-10)?**
- i) **If** Jesus turned water into an intoxicating beverage then He violated God’s Word, He sinned, and Christianity’s foundation crumbles!
 - ii) We never find drunkenness in John chapter 2 with the wine He referred to.
 - iii) Jesus never referred to the substance as “wine”. He used the words, “fruit of the vine” and “cup”.
- c) **Did Paul tell Timothy to drink fermented beverage (I Tim 5:23)?**
- i) Paul instructs Timothy to drink some wine for his stomach infirmity.
 - (1) The alcohol content was much less then now; this is the wine that the Paul permitted Timothy to partake of.
- d) **Did Jesus serve and drink wine at the last Passover (Mt 26:27; Mk 14:23; I Cor 22)?**
- i) The bread would have been unleavened for the Passover meal and therefore the wine also would have been free of leaven/yeast which is the catalyst for fermentation.
 - ii) The fact that Jesus refers to the drink as “cup” and “fruit of the vine” itself implies it was not alcoholic.
 - (1) “Fruit of the vine” was used to designate fresh, unfermented grape juice.
 - iii) Acting as high priest, which were forbidden to drink alcohol, Jesus would not have partaken of alcoholic wine.
 - iv) Jesus refers to the cup as His blood. In the NT, grape juice is called the “blood of the grape.” Would Jesus use rotten grapes (fermented) to represent His own blood? NO!
 - v) Jesus, knowing the OT Scriptures, would not have given intoxicating beverage to His disciples; He would not contradict Himself:
- Habakkuk 2:15 (NKJV)** “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, Pressing *him* to your bottle, Even to make *him* drunk, That you may look on his nakedness!

- vi) "The claim that Christ used and sanctioned the use of alcoholic beverages has been found to be unsubstantiated. The evidence we have submitted shows that Jesus abstained from all intoxicating substances and gave no sanction to His followers to use them." (*WINE IN THE BIBLE: A BIBLICAL STUDY ON THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES Chapter 5 JESUS AND WINE* Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Andrews University)

5) Alcohol and moderation: Things to Consider:

- a) The liquor industry has been trying to promote "responsible" drinking. This is done to make it socially acceptable and appear harmless.
- b) While drinking with friends may keep them from calling us judgmental, does it enhance our ability to reach them for Christ? Or do they then consider us hypocrites?
- c) 1 of every 10 who has taken a drink has become an alcoholic.
 - i) Approximately two-thirds of American adults drink an alcoholic beverage during the course of a year, and at least 13.8 million Americans develop problems associated with drinking.
- d) We can so easily become a stumbling block and an excuse for someone else, perhaps a young person to take a drink. They may be the 1 in 10 who becomes an alcoholic because of you. (1 Cor 8:9, 13; Rom 14:13; 21)
- e) **You will never become an alcoholic if you never take a first drink. No one ever plans on becoming an alcoholic.**
- f) Alcohol has a tendency to relax your morals. 60% of college girls who got STD's got it while drunk.
- g) Drunk Driving:
 - i) According to drunk driving statistics from National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), an estimated 17,419 people died in the year 2002 in alcohol-related traffic crashes, an average of one every 30 minutes.
 - ii) About three in every ten Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some time in their lives.

6) Drinking and sanctification (set apart unto God)

1 Cor. 6:20 (NKJV) For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

- a) Ask yourself these questions:
 - i) Will drinking alcohol ("socially/in moderation") enhance my personal witness?
 - ii) Can I say for certain that alcohol does not, nor ever will control me even though it is proven to be addictive?
 - iii) Why do I need to drink alcohol? Can drinking provide me with anything that God cannot give to me?
 - iv) Although I believe it will not hurt me, but will it cause me to hurt someone else?

7) The final question:

- a) Does the Bible explicitly state that drinking alcoholic beverages is wrong?
 - i) According to our amount of alcohol in our modern alcoholic beverages, yes! Our modern day alcoholic beverages qualify as "Strong Drink (*shakar*)" which is always condemned in Scripture

- b) The reason drinking wine was accepted in the biblical era was because
 - i) It was a necessary to avoid getting sick from contaminated drinking water. Since our drinking water is safe, we do not need to add alcohol to purify it.
 - ii) The alcohol content was significantly less
- c) Dr. Norman Geisler writes this, "Christians ought not to drink wine, beer, or other beverages for they are actually strong drink and forbidden in Scripture. Even ancient pagans did not drink what some Christians drink today."
- d) The Bible condemns strong drink which covers virtually all alcohol popular today, therefore, no biblical defense can be used to support the consumption of alcohol.