

Worldliness: Social Drinking

Introduction

What does the Bible say about the use of wine or alcoholic beverages? What should be the Christian's response be in view of the principles we find in God's Word?

What about Social Drinking?

Discussion

I. Cause For Concern

A. *Most Everyone Has Been Affected*

1. The church has been deeply affected by drug and alcohol addiction.
2. Many come from families with these problems. Many have been affected in some way.
3. There are many within churches who hide these problems in their lives.

B. *Alcoholism is responsible for:*

1. ***50 percent of all auto fatalities***
2. ***80 percent of all home violence***
3. ***30 percent of all suicides***
4. ***60 percent of all child abuse***
5. ***65 percent of all drownings***

C. *Statistics Are Overwhelming*

1. Over 70% of the people in this country drink.
2. Over 40 million are known alcoholics.
3. One out of seven who take their first drink becomes an alcoholic.

D. Solomon warned of the dangers of wine consumption and its effects on behavior when intoxicated. *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise." (Proverbs 20:1) "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine." (Proverbs 23:29-30)*

II. Drunkenness Is Condemned

A. Drinking & Drunkenness Is a Problem Nearly As Old As Man

1. Noah got drunk (Gen. 9:20-ff)
2. Lot got drunk (Gen. 19:30-38)

B. The Scriptures Speak Against Drunkenness

1. In the Old Testament - Proverbs 20:1; Proverbs 23:29-30
2. In the New Testament - Ephesians 5:18
 - a) Works of the flesh - Galatians 5:19-21
 - b) Cannot inherit the kingdom - 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

C. Drinking Is Deceptive (Proverbs 23:29-35)

1. Many want a brief escape. But it often becomes a permanent one. Note those who in spite of terrible consequences, go back to it.
 - a) "Alcohol does not drown care, but waters it and makes it grow faster." - Benjamin Franklin
 - b) "Drunkenness is temporary suicide; the happiness that it brings is merely negative, a momentary cessation of unhappiness." - Bertrand A. William Russell (1872-1970)
2. What the beer commercials don't show you (tragedy, ruin, deaths, etc.)

D. Dishonesty is a way of life for the addict.

1. They deny its danger. They then deny the seriousness of their own situation. (“I do not have a problem!”)
2. Lying becomes a way of life. The biggest lie they tell is to themselves!
3. In short they trust no one who will tell them the truth and offer help.

E. Results in Depression. Depression and addiction are common partners. “There is no situation so bad that a few alcoholic drinks won't make it worse.”

III. What About Social Drinking? We all know that drunkenness is a sin. But, what drinking in moderation? “Responsible drinking”? “Occasional beer or wine”?

A. Social Drinking Is Deceptive

1. 1 Peter 4:3 - “Banqueting” – Drinking - “The drinking bout, the banquet,... not of necessity excessive.” (Trench, 225) There are **different levels of drinking** in this passage and they are all condemned.
2. Is drunkenness the only thing condemned? No! There is also “revelries, drinking parties.” Note other sins that accompany the modern drink. (**Gal 5:19-21**)
3. This denotes both the action of social intercourse and the kind of drinking itself!
4. While the issue of social drinking and addiction are different but related issues, it is important to note that **addiction has a start.**

B. Drinking Is Harmful (even in “moderation”)

1. Alcohol is a poison to the body.
2. It is a sin to harm and destroy the body.
 - a) It is our responsibility in stewardship to take care of the body that belongs to God. 1 Cor. 6:19-20
 - b) It causes damage to the brain in the loss of brain cells that are irreplaceable.

C. It is “Strong Drink” (Proverbs 20:1; 31:6)

1. There is no parallel with the common Bible wines and the modern social drink, except that of strong drink. This is everywhere condemned in the scripture.
2. “Drunk” – “to grow drunk... the process of the state...” (Vines)
3. If it takes 5 beers to make you drunk, then if you have 1 beer you are one-fifth drunk.
4. It always leads to a greater state.
 - a) “A man who once drinks a single dram of liquor may die a drunkard. He who tastes it never, never can!”
 - b) Chinese proverb which says, “The man takes a drink, then the drink takes a drink, and then the drink takes the man.”

D. It Destroys the Christian’s Influence

1. How much is your soul worth? What about the soul of someone else? What does this do for your influence for Christ?
2. I have never known of a Christian who seriously wanted to reach the lost who was a social drinker. (1 Cor 9:18-23)
3. What if you saw an elder drinking at a bar? (Rom 14:13-23; 1 Peter 2:12)

IV. What About “Wine” In The Bible?

- A.** It is becoming more common to find Christians who see nothing wrong with drinking moderate amounts of modern intoxicants such as wine or beer. They often justify this by assuming that the intoxicants of our day differ very little from those spoken of in the Bible.

B. “WINE” as spoken of in the Bible is much different than what we commonly call “wine” in our society today. THREE MAJOR DIFFERENCES:

1. Ancient wines (as spoken of in the Bible) could be just referring to the grape juice.

- a) In the OT Hebrew word “**tiros**h” is used in the “generic” sense refers to the juice of the grape in any form (Isa 16:10) , whether fermented, freshly pressed, or still in the grape as in Isaiah 65:8.
- b) The fermented product was often referred to by the Hebrew “**yayin**” or “wine”. This was often the ordinary matured wine and was usually drunk diluted with water. Proverbs 23:29-30
- c) Another word used in the OT to describe wine is the Hebrew “**shechar**”; referring to “strong drink” or wine as an intoxicant, as spoken of in Proverbs 20:11; 23:29-30
- d) In the New Testament, the Greek word “**oinos**” is used in the generic sense as often translated from the Hebrew “**tiros**h” (OT Septuagint) This can again, refer to the “new” or freshly produced grape juice or that which has been allowed to ferment. The context and principles of the scriptures help us to determine the difference.
- e) Ancient people had very limited choices in beverages. (Water was often impure and wine was often used to purify it). Preservation of other juices was quite difficult due to the lack of refrigeration and the time and cost of processing and preserving juices. Today there are abundant choices of beverages, including pure water, teas, soft drinks, and juices, all of which can be drunk without addiction or questionable influence.

2. Ancient wines were commonly mixed with water, reducing the likelihood of intoxication. Today wine is commonly served unmixed, full strength.

- a) Literature of history give reference to the mixing of water wine:
“The ratio of water to wine varied. Homer (Odyssey IX, 208f.) mentions a ratio of 20 to 1, twenty parts water to one part wine. Pliny (Natural History XIV, vi, 54) mentions a ratio of eight parts water to one part wine. The poet Eunos, who lived in the fifth century B.C., is also quoted: The best measure of wine is neither much nor very little; For 'tis the cause of either grief or madness. It pleases the wine to be the fourth, mixed with three nymphs. Here is the ration of water to wine is 3 to 1” (Robert Stein, Christianity Today, 1975 “Wine Drinking in NT Times”)
- b) The mixture of wine in water was still called “wine” and it was presumed that “wine” was a mixed beverage.
Plutarch (Symposiacs III, ix) states. “We call a mixture 'wine,' although the larger of the component parts is water.”
- c) OT texts also allude to the custom of mixing wine.
”Wisdom entertains her guests to a banquet: She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table; “Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed”. (Proverbs 9:2,5) ”Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine.” (Proverbs 23:30)

3. The alcoholic content of the wine common in the first century had a much lower alcoholic content than our “wines” or alcohol beverages today and would not intoxicate unless drunk in large quantities.

- a) Ancient wines might have had alcoholic content from 5-6%; its dilution ratio with water was based on its strength; the stronger the drink, the more it was diluted. The

result would be a beverage with low alcoholic content (1-4%). Modern wines have an alcoholic content far greater and produce intoxication much quicker.

- b) *“Actually wine and beer in ancient Palestine contained not over five or eight percent alcohol because of the limitations of the natural sugar content in grape juice and the malt which was used.” (Joseph Free, Archaeology and the Bible)*
- c) *In New Testament times one would need to drink twenty two glasses of wine in order to consume the large amount of alcohol in two martinis today. Stein humorously notes, “In other words, it is possible to become intoxicated from wine mixed with three parts water, but one’s drinking would probably affect the bladder long before the mind.”*

C. When people today drink unmixed highly alcoholic wine and then use the Bible for justification, they are misusing the Bible! It is not a fair or logical comparison. A glass of unmixed wine today could have as much as 10 times the potency of a glass of mixed wine drunk in the Biblical culture!

V. Arguments To Justify Social Drinking

A. Jesus changed water to wine in the miracle at the wedding feast (John 2:1-10)

1. What is described as the “good wine”? Was it fermented or alcoholic wine?

- a) Barnes Commentary states that wine was judged to be good according to its freshness and mildness, rather than vintage and strength. Pliny, Plutarch, and Horace state that the best wine was that which was harmless....and that a good wine was one that was destitute of spirit.”
- b) It would seem then that the wine Jesus produced would be characteristic of fresh grape juice. This was the “best wine” to the Jews.

2. RW. Gray notes, “If fermented, intoxication drink is meant, a number of problems arise: 1) Did the sinless Christ do that which was strickly forbidden in the law, i.e., look upon fermented wine (Prov. 23:31)? 2) Did Jesus give His neighbor drink, in defiance of Habakkuk 2:15? 3) Did Jesus provide a beverage in such quantity and quality as to make hundreds drink in defiance of dozens of passages that condemn drunkenness?”

3. Keith Sharp, in his tract on Social Drinking, makes this observation, “If this wine was alcholic, the Master helped a bunch of drunks get totally plastered! When He challenged His enemies to name His sin (John 8:46), they could have replied, “You go a whole wedding party passing out drunk!” The context obviously demands that the wine of this passage was grape juice.”

B. Timothy was instructed to use wine (1 Timothy 5:23)

- 1. A common interpretation is to treat this text as if it gives permission to drink wine medicinally but not in any other way. I believe that misses the point, especially in light of the rest of the Biblical evidence. Timothy, for whatever reason, had chosen to drink only water. That practice was not normative for Christians and it had caused him physical difficulties.
- 2. Paul is not urging Timothy to drink wine as a medicine; and all others to never drink wine at all. He is urging him to forgo an ascetic and unhealthy practice and adopt instead the normative and healthy practice of people in the ancient world, to use a “little wine”, that is a small amount of wine mixed with water as a beverage. By doing so, he would prevent the stomach problems associated with drinking unpurified water!

C. In the NT only the use of “much wine” is prohibited (I Timothy 3:8; Titus 2:3)

1. Some contend that these texts imply that there is nothing wrong with having a little wine and therefore can drink a glass or two of modern wine or a beer or two.
2. The word “given” in the KJV is defined as: “to be given or addicted to” (Thayer). The NASV renders it, “not addicted to much wine”.
3. Steve Wallace comments, “It is possible that there were those in churches in the first century who were fighting past addiction to alcohol and perhaps had relapses into their sinful ways. Therefore, it needed to be specified that no one was to be permitted to hold a position of influence who was still wrestling with the sins of his past life. The text simply does not say “a little wine is allowed. Rather, this must be assumed by the reader”.
4. The question needs to be asked: “Is it alright to be given (addicted) to a little wine”? Paul wrote, “I will not be brought under the power of any” (I Cor. 6:12) and we are to be free from the slavery of any sin (Romans 6:12).

VI. What Should Be The Christian’s Disposition Towards Drinking?

A. We need to pay serious attention to the warnings concerning the dangers of wine and strong drink.

1. There are numerous warnings concerning the dangers of wine and strong drink. Those warnings urge the reader to consider the effects that drinking larger amounts of wine and strong drink can have on the drinker. The dangers of drinking wine in excess results in:
Slowing of the thinking processes (Prov 31:4–5; Isa 28:7; Hos 4:11)
Stupor (Jer 25:27; 51:39)
Sickness (Isa 19:14; 28:7–8 ; Jer 48:26)
Staggering (loss of balance and mental control) (Job 12:25; Isa 28:7–8; 29:9)
Arrogance (Hab 2:5)
Forgetfulness (Prov 31:6–7)
Confusion and delirious dreams (Prov 23:31, 33); sleepiness (Gen 9:20–24; 19:33)
Lack of feeling (Prov 23:31, 35)
Bloodshot eyes (Prov 23:29–30)
Poverty (Prov 23:20–21)
2. Though these effects could be achieved by drinking relatively large amounts of the mixed Biblical wines, in this society they can be achieved by drinking relatively small amounts of the powerful wines and liquors commonly available for consumption. If God warned of the dangers of drinking those beverages, would not those warnings be amplified when one is using a beverage that is far more potent?

B. We need to recognize what the Bible explicitly condemns and make no provision for it!

1. **The Bible explicitly condemns drunkenness.**
 - a. Such sins are not to be tolerated in the church. (I Corinthians 5:11)
 - b. Such sins will keep us out of heaven. (I Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21)
 - c. We should not provision for the flesh (Romans 13:13-14)
2. **The Bible explicitly condemns participation in carousing and drinking parties.**
“For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation..” (1 Peter 4:3-4) Not three words:

- a. **“drunkenness” or “excess of wine”** (Greek - oinophlugia) Lexicographers define it as *“drunkenness, implying the consumption of a large quantity of wine.”*
- b. **“carousing” or “reveling”** {komos) Refers to *“drinking parties involving unrestrained indulgence in alcoholic beverages and accompanying immoral behavior”*. Trench distinguishes “komos” as combining the concepts of “riot and revelry”. Trench in his “Synonyms of the NT” indicates that “potos” refers to “the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium, not of necessity excessive, but giving opportunity for excess”.
- c. **“banqueting” or “carousing”** (potos) *“not necessarily excessive...but giving the opportunity for excess.”* (Trench) “potos is a word that only appears in this verse; chiefly applied to social drinking at the banquet” (Meyer) The context suggests that “a drinking” is the definition of the word here.
- d. These three words are different. They clearly speak of different levels of consumption. We all agree that the Bible condemns drunkenness and the drinking party, but what does “banqueting” teach us with regards to drinking moderate amounts of intoxicants and social drinking?

C. We should consider the effect of our example and influence on others, especially young people, those with weak consciences, and the world about us.

1. Before a person decides to drink or to continue drinking, he should be fully aware of the following facts about alcoholic beverages and their effects today.

An estimated ten million problem drinkers or alcoholics are in the United States adult population.

Of adults who drink, 36 percent can be classed as problem drinkers.

In addition, an estimated 3.3 million young people ages 14–17 are problem drinkers. Between 1966 and 1975 the percent of high school students who said they had been drunk increased from 19 percent to 45 percent.

A high percentage of child-abusing parents have drinking problems.

Alcohol-related deaths may run as high as 200,000 per year. In two years’ time there are as many alcoholic-related deaths as there were in the entire Vietnam War!

Half of all traffic fatalities and one-third of all traffic injuries are alcohol-related.

Whereas a person has the legal right to drink, he does not have the right to endanger the lives of others on the highway by his drinking.

A relatively high correlation exists between alcohol consumption and robbery, rape, assault, homicide; and more than one-third of suicides involve alcohol.

Fetal alcohol syndrome is the third greatest cause of birth defects.

Alcohol is one cause of cancer.

Evidence exists that social drinking impairs one’s social and intellectual capacities.

Rather than getting sharper, people who drink get duller.

Alcohol abuse and alcoholism cost the United States about \$50 billion in 1975. That figure has risen considerably since then. Taxpayers pay \$11 to offset each \$1 paid in liquor revenue.

2. Public advocacy of “responsible drinking” can easily be taken as permission to freely use alcoholic beverages with catastrophic results to the young.

- a) *Young people often do not have the maturity to know the inherent dangers of alcohol consumption and may take the advocacy of drinking as permission to freely use alcohol resulting in misuse, addiction, and drunkenness.*

b) *“And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. (Mark 9:42)*

c) A good question for all adults to consider is, “How can we consistently condemn the recreational use of drugs among the young like marijuana while maintaining the right to drink what produces the same effect?”

3. Paul affirmed that even Christian liberties must not become a means to hurt a brother or sister in Christ. *“It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.” (Romans 14:21)*

D. Social drinking places us in bad company. I Cor. 15:33 *“Listen, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.” (Proverbs 23:19-21)*

Conclusion

“It must be borne in mind that the drink question is far more complex and acute in modern than in Biblical times, and that the conditions of the modern world have given rise to problems which were not within the horizon of New Testament writers. The habit of excessive drinking has spread enormously among the common people, owing largely to the cheapening of alcoholic drinks. The fact that the evil exists today in greater proportions may call for a drastic remedy and a special crusade. But rather than defend total abstinence by a false or forced exegesis, it were better to admit that the principle is not formally laid down in the New Testament, while maintaining that there are broad principles enunciated, which in view of modern conditions should lead to voluntary abstinence from all intoxicants. Such principles may be found, e. g. in our Lord's teaching in Matt 16:24; Mk 9:42, and in--Rom 14:13-21; 1 Cor 8:8-13.” (ISBE)

“I want to make sure that I do not lose control of my thoughts and consequently do something that I would regret for life. Consequently I am committed to never using any substance in any amount that would put me at risk of losing personal control over my actions. I want to always live by the principle of love. For me, that means that I would carefully avoid any practice that might hurt others, that might lead them to do something that would hurt themselves. I urge you to do the same.” (Johnny Felker)

If alcoholism is a disease:

- * It is the only disease that produces revenue for the government;
- * It is the only disease that provokes crime;
- * It is the only disease that is habit forming;
- * It is the only disease that brings violent death on the highways;
- * It is the only disease that is spread by advertising;
- * It is the only disease without a germ or virus cause.