

Web – Article – The Sinfulness of Alcohol

Alcohol is very prevalent in our society. Every time we turn on the television, we are told that we must consume alcohol in order to have fun. While the advertisers would never admit it, these commercials are often targeted towards teenagers. They want to instill in them the idea that they must buy their product in order to entertain themselves. They show young twenty-something's on the beach having a party or a group of friends enjoying a night out on the town.

It is a tragedy that they do not show those same people later in the evening or later in life. They will not show you the man, in his early fifties, lying on the hospital bed dying from liver disease. They will not show you the family who, because of alcohol, has just been beaten up by their father. They will not show you the horrific accident scene, where the drunk walks away, and a mother and her two children are killed. They portray alcohol as a good thing; and they never consider the after-effects of this habit-forming drug.

Arguments for Drinking Alcohol

Many Christians will try to justify the drinking of alcohol. But what does the Bible really say about alcohol? Is it acceptable before God, or does He condemn it? The following are the most common arguments that some will use to try and justify drinking; and the reason why each argument is false.

1. Some will argue that because the Bible only condemns being drunk (*Eph. 5:18*), they are free to drink as long as they do not drink too much. Using their same logic, they would have to say that it is okay, in God's eyes, to be drunk with beer or whiskey, because the Bible only says "*do not be drunk with wine.*" Therefore, any alcoholic drink besides wine would be permitted. Obviously, this is not what God had in mind when Paul penned this passage.

2. Some will also look to the Lord's Supper to "prove" that it is okay to consume alcohol. They argue that they used wine to symbolize the blood of Christ, and therefore, it is okay to use wine today.

However, did you know that the Bible never says that we should use wine in the Lord's Supper? Any time we read of the Lord's Supper, we read of "*the fruit of the vine*" (Mt. 26:29; Mk. 14:25; Lk. 22:18) or "*the cup*" (I Cor. 11:25-26). There is never an indication that the early church used alcohol to partake of the Lord's Supper. In fact, we know that the wine that Jesus used in instituting the Lord's Supper was unfermented because this event took place during the Passover. Remember, during the Passover, the Jews were not allowed to have anything that was leavened (contained yeast), which was necessary for fermentation to occur (Ex. 12:19-20).

3. Some will also argue that because they drank wine in the New Testament, we can drink wine today. However, we must understand the kind of wine that they used. Obviously, they did have alcoholic wine. But they also had non-alcoholic wine. The context of the passage will determine what kind of wine it was.

In the time of Christ, they had three ways of preventing grape juice from fermenting and turning into alcohol (Cooper, 3). One way was to bury the wine, either in a body of water or in the ground. The cooler temperatures would keep the grape juice from fermenting. Another way to keep grape juice from fermenting was to boil it. The extreme heat would kill the yeast that appears on the grapes and thus prevent fermentation. The third way to prevent fermentation was to filter the grapes. Because the yeast is found on the outside of the grapes, they would be removed and filtered. This would leave the juice that would not ferment.

It should also be noted that they did use fermented wine to purify their water. However, when diluted, the alcoholic content of the water was extremely low; and it was impossible to become drunk by drinking this purified water (Cooper, 4). The idea is that they, in the New Testament, could drink “wine” and not consume alcohol.

4. Some will use John 2:1-12 in an attempt to show that drinking alcoholic beverages is approved by God. After all, they say, Jesus turned water into wine. The problem with this argument is simple: how do we know that the water that Jesus turned into wine was fermented? Obviously, we cannot assume that it contained alcohol. However, there are at least two indications that the wine was not alcoholic.

First, if those at the feast were drunk, and Jesus made alcoholic wine to give to the people, then Jesus was contributing to the drunkenness of the people. This, obviously, is a violation of the will of God (I Cor. 6:9-10). Therefore, it stands to reason that the alcohol He created was non-alcoholic.

Second, when the master of the feast tasted it, he immediately commented on how good it was (Jn. 2:10). The master could not have known the alcoholic content of the wine by one quick taste. He was commenting on the quality of the taste, not the quantity of the alcohol.

5. Some also use I Timothy 5:23 to show that “*a little wine*” is approved by God. However, we need to understand the context and meaning of this passage. First, Timothy obviously did not drink anything that was alcoholic. We know this because Paul had to encourage Timothy to drink even “*a little wine.*” If Timothy consistently partook of alcoholic wine, then Paul would have had no need to encourage him to drink.

Second, the wine was for medical purposes (“*for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities*”). No one doubts the benefits of a little alcohol for medical reasons. However, today we have better medicines than alcohol and must be very careful as to how we use alcohol for medical purposes. (We must also be careful of how we “prescribe” this medication to ourselves.)

Third, because the wine was for medical reasons, the implication was that Timothy was to stop drinking this wine when he felt better. It was not to become a habit for him. In light of other passages that pertain to alcohol, Paul is not permitting Timothy to drink freely; but rather he is allowing him to drink wine only when it is necessary.

Arguments Against Drinking Alcohol

The Bible is clear when it comes to drinking alcohol. If anyone is willing to study the word of God, they will easily see that consuming alcoholic beverages is prohibited by God. Consider the following scriptures concerning alcohol.

1. Solomon makes it very clear that it is not good to consume wine. He says, “*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise*” (Prov. 20:1). It is apparent, by the context, that Solomon is speaking of alcoholic wine. To say that “*wine is a mocker*” is to say that it is deceiving. It pretends to be a good thing, while in reality, it causes nothing but harm. Alcohol deceives a person and then it destroys him.

It is interesting to note Solomon’s words as he closes out this proverb. He says, “*whoever is led astray by it is not wise.*” According to Solomon, no one who is smart will think that alcohol does no harm. Solomon makes it very clear that alcohol is not profitable for us.

2. Solomon also speaks of the destructiveness of alcohol. In Prov. 23:29, Solomon asks a series of questions. “*Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?*” Certainly, the one who has these things is a miserable person. What is interesting is not the question, but the answer.

“*Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. {31} Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; {32} At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. {33} Your 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?’*” (Prov. 32:30-35). It is the one who partakes of alcohol that suffers from these things. Solomon is very clear: alcohol is destructive!

3. Solomon also warns us to stay away from the one who partakes of alcohol. He says, “*Hear, my son, and be wise; and guide your heart in the way. {20} Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat;* (Prov. 23:19-20). The warning is very simple: do not be around those who partake of wine (alcohol) and to those who are gluttons. In fact, Solomon says that the one who is around this type of person is not smart.

In warning us of the drunkard and the glutton, Solomon warns us of their end. He says that they “*will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags*” (Prov. 23:21). There is nothing good that can come from being around those who consume alcohol on a regular basis. Therefore, we must heed this warning.

4. It is important also to consider our influence. The Bible is very plain in that we, as Christians, should be separate from the world (Rom. 12:2; I Jn. 2:15-17). We should not live like those in the world. Jesus says that we “*are the salt of the earth*” (Matt.

5:13) and “*the light of the world*” (Matt. 5:14). Christians should have an influence for good on the world around them.

Could we speak of the righteousness of God with a beer in our hand? Could we encourage others to live a holy and godly life if we routinely consume alcohol? Our influence is greatly diminished when we live like the world. James tells us that whoever “*wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (Js. 4:4). When we try to be like the world, we are an enemy of God.

Conclusion

God has never intended the Christian to consume alcohol. He wants us to live a holy and godly life. In fact, by noticing these scriptures, there is no doubt that the consumption of alcohol is a violation of God’s will. It is not something that He wants His children to be a part of.

Of course, in all things that deal with the word of God, no one man can declare something to be sinful. It must come from God Himself, which is told to us through His word. Study the word of God for yourself to find out if these things are so. If they are true to His word, then follow them. Remember, it is Christ who is “*the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*” (Heb. 5:9). When it comes to the consumption of alcohol, we must be obedient to His word.

Endnotes

Cooper, Dan and Katherine Cooper; Article – “The Christian and Social Drinking.”
(Please contact the Ridge Avenue church of Christ for a copy of this article.)