

Ten Reasons Christians Should Not Drink Alcohol

Introduction. More and more Christians are confronted with the question of whether or not Christians can drink alcohol. This is an important question with some serious consequences.

- If the answer is “no,” then those who would allow themselves this indulgence lay a stumbling-block before others, present an inconsistent message to the world, and fill the church with a dangerous “leaven” that could infiltrate the soundness of a local church.
- If the answer is “yes,” then those who would oppose all drinking are binding human tradition, laying unnecessary burdens on others, and seeking to restrict things that God has not restricted.

The answer to this question (and all questions) is to be found in God’s word. We must always have the courage and the honesty to dig into Scripture to find the answers we seek. This morning I want us to do this together, as we consider ten reasons that Scripture teaches Christians should not drink alcohol.

I. Drunkards Will Go to Hell (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

- A. We note “drunkards” will not inherit the kingdom of God. There is only one alternative for those who are not saved—they are lost and condemned to hell.
- B. We note, “such *were* some of you” (11). This is describing an unrepentant condition. I may have been a drunkard in the past, but I cannot *be* a drunkard and go to heaven.

II. Drunkenness is Not the Only Thing Condemned about Drinking (1 Pet. 4:1-5).

- A. This text describes the character of repentance described in 1 Corinthians 6:11. I call your attention to three words here that relate to drinking: “drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties.” All three of these relate to actions involving alcoholic drink.
- B. “Drunkenness” is obviously intoxication, but the other two also relate to sins involving drinking.
- C. “Revelries” from Gr. *komos* meaning - “a revel, carousel, i.e. in the Greek writers properly a nocturnal and riotous procession of half-drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honor of Bacchus [i.e. the god of wine] or some other deity” (Thayer, p. 367). This refers to *Mardi Gras-like* parties in which inhibitions are lowered due to drink. “Orgies” (NIV, ESV) is too narrow. The ancients called these *Bacchanals*—processions that celebrated Bacchus, the God of wine. These can happen even when there is no pagan god—it is when drink is used to lower inhibitions. It may not involve intoxication, but it is still sin.
- D. “Drinking parties” from Gr. *potos* “a drinking or a carousing” (Thayer, p. 533). This is a word that doesn’t refer to drunkenness at all. This is just indulging in the pleasure of drink (no “buzz”—no sensuality) just drinking period! Peter says, “you have spent enough time” doing this (i.e. *don’t do it anymore!*).

III. Christians are Priests (1 Peter 2:1-5).

- A. We note here that in Christ there is no special class of priests—all Christians are “priests” who offer up spiritual sacrifices to God.
- B. Mosaic law concerning priests (Lev. 10:8-11). When the priests served in the tabernacle (or later temple) they were to totally abstain from all drink that could be alcoholic so that they could “distinguish between” holy and unholy, and clean and unclean.
- C. If we are priests in the spiritual Israel (cf. Gal. 6:16) when is it that we are ever not serving in the temple of God? We too should abstain from all intoxicants.

IV. Christians are Saints (1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 2:17-19).

- A. We note here that Christians in general are considered “saints.” The term “saint” means “holy” or “set apart unto God.”

- B. Mosaic law regarding those “set apart unto God” (Num. 6:1-6). Now there are elements of the law of the Nazirite that are not taught in the New Testament at all (e.g. long hair, eating grapes or raisins), but those which relate to drink, sobriety and self-control certainly do.
- C. John the Baptist may not have been a Nazirite, but this restriction regarding drink was to apply to him (cf. Luke 1:15). As those *set apart* unto God, our days of “separation” never come to an end. We then should abstain from all intoxicants as Christians.

V. Christians are to be Temperate (1 Tim. 3:2, 11; Titus 2:2).

- A. These texts apply the word “temperate” or “sober” to elders, deacons, and older men, however we 1 Peter 5:3 teaches elders are to be examples. It then follows that behavior to be exemplified in these men should be the desired practice of all Christians.
- B. This word comes from Gr. *nephaleos* meaning “sober, temperate, abstaining from wine...” (Thayer, p. 425). In Attic inscriptions. It is used to denote wine-less altars and offerings (Introduction to Greek Epigraphy, E. S. Roberts & E. A. Gardner. Cambridge: University Press, 1905 - Vol. II, pp.379-380; 387-388).
- C. If Christians are to be “temperate” or “sober” this does not just refer to avoiding drunkenness—it commands abstinence from intoxicants.

VI. Even One Drink Impairs Judgment (1 Pet. 5:8; Matt. 24:42-44).

- A. These texts teach the importance of watchfulness, and preparedness for temptation and for the Lord’s return. Sin is not just the overt acts of grave misconduct—it is thought, attitude, word, it can be hatred, covetousness, lust, envy, bitterness, profanity, blasphemy—and it can send us to hell!
- B. Christians must be prepared at all times to guard against sin, to set the proper example, to be ready to stand before the Lord. Can any of us imagine appearing before the Lord with less than our full mind, judgment and self-control?
- C. We all have heard scandalous stories about pilots, bus drivers, train engineers, air traffic controllers, or others having serious lapses in judgment because of being impaired by even a small amount of alcohol. Why? Consider some statistics on consumption of even small amounts of alcohol:
 1. Impairment in performance begins at below 0.02% BAC (1 to 1-1/2 drinks can result in this level). (NIAAA - Alcohol Problems and Aging: 1998 U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services).
 2. At low doses the effects of alcohol may include alterations in mood, cognition, anxiety level, and motor performance. It may also impair performance several hours after the blood alcohol level has gone down. Even slightly elevated levels result in more fatal accidents, and the majority of individuals who experience a problem related to alcohol use are light and moderate drinkers. (Department of Health and Human Services in their reports to Congress 1990 and 1993).
 3. One to two drinks of alcohol impair mental and physical abilities; mental processes such as restraint, awareness, concentration and judgment are affected, reaction time slowed, and an inability to perform complicated tasks. (“The Effects of Alcohol and Other Drugs,” Motorcycle Safety Foundation, Irvine, CA, 1991).
 4. Any blood alcohol level, even a BAC of 0.02%, the result of just one drink, increases the risk of a crash. Alcohol impairs nearly every aspect of the brain’s ability to process information, as well as the eye’s ability to focus and react to light. (University of California, Berkeley, Wellness Letter, Jan. 1998).
- B. We are at war! Satan wants us to do anything that will lower our self-control, lessen our inhibitions, loosen our tongue, and impair our judgment. Any Christian that imagines that we can be right with God deliberately injecting into our system a chemical that will aid Satan in all of these areas has not studied God’s word carefully enough, nor taken the danger of sin seriously enough!

VII. It Could Cause Others to Stumble (Rom. 14:20-21).

- A. The context of this passage is talking about the attitude that Christians should take towards those who converted to Christ from Judaism and still struggle with Jewish dietary laws. This is not a perfect parallel to our topic in that following Mosaic dietary laws was not sinful, nor was failure to follow them under Christ.
 - 1. Yet, some would mistakenly say “drunkenness is all that is condemned—I can drink in moderation and not get drunk, and it’s ok!” We have already seen problems with this—but even if that was true, what does this passage say about that?
 - 2. Let’s say you can drink in moderation, does that mean that everyone can?
- B. A simple but absolute cure is available to prevent drunkenness—don’t take that first drink! There appears to be a biological difference in people that makes it easier for some people to have addictive, compulsive personalities—while others never have this struggle.
 - 1. Imagine that I struggled with an addiction to chocolate. I didn’t like it but, for whatever reason, any time I took a bite of chocolate I could not stop until I ate so much chocolate I was vomiting chocolate and had spent every penny I had on chocolate.
 - 2. Would you say to yourself, “That’s your problem—I can eat chocolate in front of you and it’s your problem if you can’t control yourself?”
 - 3. In Christ, we cannot have this attitude (Phil 2:3-4). Christians should not drink alcohol because there is never any way to know if our influence on others will lead them to stumble.
 - 4. What if that one we cause to stumble, is our child? Is it worth it? Absolutely not! Christians should do all we can to avoid making anyone stumble.

VIII. It Could Damage Our Influence (Matt. 5:13-16).

- A. Jesus teaches here that our behavior is to be such that it leads others to “glorify God.”
- B. Influencing others to come to Christ is a difficult thing. We are calling on people to turn away from sin, and demonstrate self-control, in obedience to Christ and His word. Does drinking alcohol help with this process or hurt this process?
 - 1. Imagine you are talking to someone about coming to Christ. You have talked to them about sobriety and self-control—but they bump into you at the store with a “six-pack,” or at the restaurant with a glass of wine. Does this help, or hurt your efforts?
 - 2. Imagine you have a brother or sister in Christ that respects your knowledge of God’s word, and admires your love of God, but they have struggled with addiction to drink in the past. What if they see you in the same situation? Will your influence be the same?
 - 3. What if it is a young person. Teenage years are so hard. Their friends pressure them to act “grown-up” and go to those parties where kids are drinking, or to see how fun you are “wasted!” If they see you, how does that influence them?
- C. Influence is the most precious asset any Christian has to “let their light shine” to others. It can so easily be compromised. Christians should abstain from alcohol because of the tremendous risk it poses to our influence with others.

IX. Ancient Drinks and Modern Drinks are not the Same (John 2:1-10; 1 Tim. 5:23).

- A. These two passages illustrate two of the most common passages that are often used by those who would argue that Christians can drink because (as they say) “Jesus drank wine!” and “Paul commanded Timothy to drink wine!”
- B. The context of 1 Tim. 5:23 clearly demonstrates a medicinal application to Paul’s command. He speaks of his “infirmities.”
- C. Did Jesus provide this huge amount of an alcoholic drink to people to whom he would later reveal that drunkenness can lead to condemnation?
- D. Principles regarding ancient drink.
 - 1. Equal names were applied to alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.
 - 2. Ancients knew how to impede fermentation. Things such as boiling and filtration do a great deal to impede fermentation. Both of these methods are described extensively by ancient writers.
 - 3. Most ancients watered down their drinks. Some sources record portions of 1 part wine to 20 parts water!

4. This made the alcohol content of ancient drinks different from modern drinks that bear the same names. Homemade wine is usually only about 6% alcohol, but modern fortified wines are about 18%.
- E. Yes, there were alcoholic drinks but it is misunderstanding Scripture to think that references to wine, or strong drink in the Bible equals modern drinks.
 1. Distillation of strong alcoholic drinks was not invented until the Middle Ages.
 2. Modern beers and wines have sugars, yeast, and distilled alcohol added to boost alcohol content. As a result at its worst beers (for example) at their strongest were only 2-3% alcohol while modern beers are usually 5% and above.

X. We Have So Many Other Choices (1 Cor. 10:25-31).

- A. Imagine if you lived in the world of the Bible. You might draw water from a well, you might have a cow or a goat to milk. You might even have a vineyard, a fruit tree or a grainfield from which you could make some drinks. In the market you could purchase drinks, and if they were drinks from grapes or fruits, you could take measures to preserve them or prevent any type of intoxication.
- B. How does this compare to our day? We can go to the grocery store and walk down an aisle with hundreds of choices of juices, and soft drinks, or milks, and teas. We could drink any of these with no risk of compromising our salvation, our influence, our judgment or our self-control.
- C. Why, with all of these choices would anyone choose drinks that do? Christians should not!

Kyle Pope, preached at
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