

TC Ministries

Equipping the Church for the Work of Ministry

What the Bible says about **ALCOHOL**

What Christians Believe Series

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What does
the Bible teach
on Alcohol?



Should Christians
be tee-total and
abstain?



Explain Paul's
admonition to
Timothy about
Alcohol (1 Tim 5:23)



If you want to know more
about this topic, or have any
questions about the Christian faith:

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INTRODUCTION - Controversy, Conflict and Confusion

The Controversy

The issue of Christian's drinking alcohol has often been the subject of controversy down through the years. Both religious and non-religious people and organisations see the very real dangers and great harm that comes as a result of the abuse of alcoholic drinks.

In Australia we are bombarded with data on the alarming rise in the numbers of young people getting drunk and how it affects them negatively, often in public but also amongst their own friends and families. It is potentially addictive and very destructive when abused on a regular basis.

The Conflict

Discussion about alcohol often results in heated debate. Christians come into conflict with one another over this issue because some say we should never drink alcohol, while others say alcohol is okay in moderation and that as Christians we should simply never get drunk.

The Confusion

The reason for much of this controversy and conflict seems to be because there are several issues involved, not just what the Bible teaches. This can and does create a great deal of confusion at times.

ALCOHOL AND THE BIBLE

During biblical times, in Israel, the main alcoholic drink was wine, although beer and mead (fermented honey) were also available. Both the Old and New Testaments have something to say about this subject.

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ALCOHOL

There are two main Hebrew words that are translated as wine in the Old Testament. These are **“yayin”** and **“tirosh”**. Both words refer to alcoholic wine.

Consider this verse:

***“Harlotry, wine (yayin) and new wine (tirosh)
take away the understanding” (Hosea 4:11)***

In the Old Testament, wine is associated with three things:

- Blessing
- Sin
- Special Commitments to God

Wine: A Blessing From God

“He (God) causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of Man. That he may bring forth food from the earth and wine (yayin) that makes glad the heart of man” (Ps 104:14-15)

Wine: Drunkenness And Sin

The greater number of references to the use of wine in the Bible refer to problems related to its abuse. Consider these passages from the book of Proverbs:

***“Wine (yayin) is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling,
and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Prov 20:1)***

“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things” (Prov 23:29-35)

Wine: Special Instructions

“And the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying, ‘Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them by Moses”’ (Lev 10:8-11)

Old Testament Summary

1. Wine is the translation of two words, **“yayin”** and **“tirosh”**. Both these words refer to alcoholic wine.
2. Although wine is associated with blessing, there are many Scriptures which warn against its dangers, and there are Scriptures that show clearly that some people, when called of God to do so, are required to completely abstain from ever drinking alcoholic drinks at all.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND ALCOHOL

In the New Testament, the words, **“oinos”** and **“gleukos”** refer to alcoholic wines.

“And do not be drunk with wine (oinos), in which is dissipation (debauchery), but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18)

“Others, mocking, said, “They are full of new wine” (gleukos) (Acts 2:13)

In the New Testament wine is mostly associated with sin and drunkenness, but is not forbidden to be taken.

With respect to this (and many other issues) the example a believer gives to others is of the utmost importance.

Wine Not Forbidden

“No longer drink only water, but use a little wine (oinos) for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Tim 5:23)

Wine, Works of the Flesh

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are; adultery, fornication ... drunkenness ... and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in times past, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19-21)

Alcohol and Our Example

In the many issues we face every day, God holds us accountable for the example we give. In these days, particularly, this must be seen to apply to the issue of alcohol. Consider Jesus' own words in Matthew 18:6:

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea”

Consider also Romans 14:21-23:

“It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine (oinos), nor do anything by which your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats because he does not eat from faith; For whatever is not of faith is sin”

New Testament Summary

Wine is not forbidden. In fact, in one Scripture Paul told Timothy to drink some wine for health reasons.

1. Personal example is the most important issue when considering whether or not to drink any wine or drink containing alcohol, even if you never get drunk.
2. Drunkenness is forbidden in the Scriptures. It is a work of the flesh which may even prevent you from entering into the kingdom of God.

DEFINING DRUNKENNESS

Drunkenness is simply the effect of having too much alcohol in the bloodstream. This, in turn, affects other organs in the body. It is the effect on the brain that causes most of the symptoms of drunkenness. As a person drinks alcohol and the level of alcohol increases in the blood, a person goes through definite stages of increasing drunkenness. These stages are as follows:

Euphoria

Euphoria is a false sense of well-being. A person in a state of euphoria often feels very confident and is likely to take chances they would not normally take. It is the first effect of alcoholic drunkenness and begins at very low concentrations.

Slower Reflexes

This occurs at the same time as euphoria and is one of the reasons that driving vehicles or operating machinery is more dangerous when a person has been drinking alcohol.

In a sense, alcohol lies to us. It says, “*Go for it, you can do it!*”, while at the same time it slows down our reflexes and makes us less able to function.

It is now possible to determine precisely the level of alcohol in the blood at which this slowing of the reflexes begins. It is at around 0.02%, which is less than half the legal limit for driving in all Australian States and Territories, which is 0.05%.

Reduced Inhibitions

The next stage is to see inhibitions reduced. This is the natural progression from euphoria. Because of this a person is likely to do immoral or embarrassing things they would not normally do.

Dizziness

As the blood alcohol increases, a person begins to feel a light-headedness often described as being “*tipsy*”. This is believed to be the result of the alcohol causing the brain to be starved of the glucose it needs to operate efficiently.

Emotional Instability

As a person's blood alcohol level passes about 0.09%, self-control is lessened even further, and we become emotionally unstable. At this point a person may become wildly happy, depressed or aggressive.

Loss of Control

As the blood alcohol level increases past 0.18%, a person becomes confused and impaired in their senses. This stage is associated with staggering and slurring of speech, along with a decreased sense of pain.

Unconsciousness

As a person's blood alcohol content approaches 0.27%, they may actually pass out and become unconscious.

Coma

If a person has drunk sufficient alcohol to become unconscious, even while they are unconscious their body will continue to absorb the alcohol and their state of unconsciousness will deepen into a coma. **This happens at around 0.36%.**

Death - This happens at around 0.44%.

So How Much Can A Person Drink?

The amount that a person can drink before their blood alcohol level passes 0.02% is about one medium glass of beer, one small glass of wine, or a small "nip" of spirits.

But I Can Take It!

Quite often you might hear people saying, "I can take it!", or "It takes a lot to get me drunk!". This statement is pure nonsense. All it means is that this sort of person may not feel drunk as quickly as others!

If anything, such people are more dangerous than those who feel the effects of alcohol more quickly, since they will stay for a longer time in that state of euphoria in which actions born of ill-judgment are likely to occur.

THE PROBLEM OF ALCOHOLISM

Alcoholism occurs when a person has become dependent upon alcohol.

There are two main types of alcoholism. The first is physical, the second is emotional and may even be spiritual.

The physical aspects of alcoholism are often the easiest to deal with. After about a week free of alcohol most people will not feel any physical after-effects. Some people, who have abused their bodies with an over-indulgence of alcoholic beverages for an extended period of time, may develop cirrhosis of the liver or even brain damage in extreme cases.

The emotional and spiritual aspects of alcohol are the most difficult to deal with.

There are deep-seated and unresolved issues to deal with, often relating to severe personal trauma, which need to be addressed and for which alcohol was sought as an answer. Often these issues relate to family problems, hurts in relationships, feelings of failure, rebellion, abuse and so forth.

The reason that Christian ministries are often so successful in this area is because they are able to bring the truth of the gospel and the power of Jesus Christ to bear on these problems, no matter how deep-seated or longstanding they may be.

Alcoholics and Our Example

One of the reasons Christians need to be careful about drinking alcohol is the example given to many people in our society who have a problem in this area.

People with drinking problems usually have no concept of what it means to “drink in moderation”, and therefore will often take the example presented by anyone consuming alcohol as an excuse for their own drunkenness.

CHILDREN AND ALCOHOL

With respect to the issue of children and drinking alcohol, there are two matters which need to be considered. Firstly there is the issue of the special needs of children, and secondly there is the issue of the law of the land regarding under-age drinking.

The Special Needs of Children

Children, because of their size, are adversely affected by much smaller amounts of alcohol than adults. ***Alcohol can be quite dangerous for children.*** Most fatalities due to drinking alcohol (other than chronic alcoholics) are amongst children or young teenagers.

The Law of The Land

Children, and teenagers under 18 years of age, are prohibited from purchasing alcohol in Australia, or from going into places where alcohol is sold. Unfortunately, there are no similar laws making the consumption of alcohol an offence for under-age drinkers. However, it is a positive testimony as a Christian to obey the law of the land - and a negative one not to do so.

PUBS, CLUBS, PARTIES AND ‘RAGING’

Closely allied to the issue of alcohol is the problem of the sort of places where it is consumed, and the sort of company that is kept when it is being consumed.

Clearly some people can enjoy a drink with friends, whether in the home, at a party or even at a Pub or Club of some sort. Jesus seems to have had no trouble on this score himself. However there are those who cannot enjoy just one drink, or who are using alcohol as a crutch to cover more deep-seated issues in their lives.

Then there are those who just like to ‘rage’. By definition this means heavy duty partying, drinking, probably drugs and certainly questionable company, especially for the Christian. Consider The following two passages:

“Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags” (Prov 23:20)

“Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue till night, till wine inflames them! The harp and the strings, the tambourine and the flute, and wine are in their feasts; but they do not regard the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of His hands. Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; their honourable men are famished, and their multitude is parched with thirst. Therefore Sheol (death) has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure” (Isa 5:11-13)

These Scriptures speak plainly for themselves for those with ears to hear.

Unless you are very sure of yourself, you should avoid frequenting places where alcohol and other illicit substances are used and abused, and avoid the type of company that has little or no respect for moderation in such things - especially if you are prone to weakness in regard to issues surrounding alcohol and other substance abuse.

CALLED TO FREEDOM

Paul states in Gal 5:1 “it is for freedom Christ set us free”, therefore we should avoid submitting again to a ‘yoke of bondage’. He was speaking here in relation to circumcision, which Jewish believers in Christ were struggling to reconcile with Gentiles not being circumcised as part of their salvation commitment.

We should not allow anyone else’s legalistic views, however sincere and often related to their own adverse personal experience when it comes to alcohol, to become our own ‘yoke of bondage’. In the same chapter Paul goes on to say:

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13)

Friend of Publicans and Sinners

The Bible tells us Jesus was accused of being a friend of “publicans and sinners”. Although we have little detail, it would appear that Jesus was able to befriend those who the established church (synagogue) considered the “*low life*” of the time. However, it is clear that He was also able to draw a crowd, minister in power and with the authority of the Holy Spirit, and touch people’s lives for good.

Let’s not confuse either our own mission or motivation with that of Jesus’, unless we are expecting to see similar results!

It is not wrong to visit a pub or club and have a drink with your friends. But wherever you go, whatever you do, you are setting an example as a believer for others to follow (Matt 18:6). Whether you know it or not, your conscience and ongoing spiritual testimony and integrity will answer for the decisions you make in this regard.

Essentially there is nothing the Bible teaches that will forbid you to drink alcohol, or even to visit the places mentioned if you so choose.

But you are warned to take care lest you fall. We are called to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world. We have a message of hope, freedom and liberty to share, and a gospel message to promote and defend. It is not for the Church to decide how this should be done, or to monitor your activities and dictate how you should spend your time socially.

CHURCH RESPONSIBILITY

Any church, in regard to issues such as this, must be very careful to avoid “legislating”. This is because of the very powerful truth of Christian liberty:

- Jesus Came To Set Us Free -

Not bind us up with a fresh set of Pharisaical rules and regulations

At the same time, however, we are told to be careful with our example to others.

For this reason, it is both reasonable and responsible to determine that as Christians we neither support nor condemn alcohol consumption in and of itself. We should avoid legislating on this topic morally or biblically.

Having friends and church members around for dinner and sharing a bottle of wine with the meal is entirely up to the individuals involved. Personal consumption of alcoholic beverages is something each individual believer must determine within their own hearts and minds.

Just remember, we are all responsible and accountable to God, and to one another, for the example we set (1 Cor 8:9). So do not let what you consider to be your “*freedom in Christ*” become a stumbling block for anyone else!

Acknowledgment

My thanks and appreciation go to Peter Carblis for granting permission to use his research material in preparing this booklet.

Discussions about alcohol amongst Christians can be problematic and very much influenced by culture, background or experience rather than biblical teaching.

This booklet may challenge some pre-conceived ideas. However, we hope and trust you find it interesting and stimulating reading.

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