

Is It Wrong to Drink?

Drinking beer, wine, whiskey and other beverages which contain alcohol, and therefore make one drunk, is a very old practice. The first time drinking is mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis, chapter 9. Noah, a righteous man, became drunk and lay naked in his tent. This good man had his sense of right and wrong dulled by the evil effects of drinking. In Genesis 19, we read of another righteous man, Lot, who was overcome by the evil effects of alcohol. While drunk, he had sexual relations with his own daughters! Again, a good man lost his sense of right and wrong when under the influence of alcohol. The writer of Proverbs warned: *“Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; And whosoever erreth thereby is not wise”* (Proverbs 20:1).

Some people try to support their sinful habit of drinking by going to the Bible. They point out that some passages in the Bible speak of drinking wine as a good thing (Genesis 14:18; Amos 9:14; Zechariah 10:7, etc). But there are also many other passages which condemn the drinking of wine (Genesis 9:20-21; 19:30-35; Leviticus 10:8-10; Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4-5; Daniel 1:8; Isaiah 5:22; 28:7; Habakkuk 2:15). How can the drinking of wine be both commended and condemned? Does the Bible contradict itself? If it does, then it cannot be the Word of God!

The Bible does not contradict itself. The Bible is the Word of God. A correct understanding of the word “wine” in the Bible depends upon the meaning of the words which are translated “wine” in our English Bible. The Old Testament was first written in the Hebrew language. There are eleven different Hebrew words which are all translated “wine.” The New Testament was first written in Greek. There are two different Greek words which are translated “wine” in our English New Testament.

In his book *Bible Wines*, William Patton quotes the Bible scholar Moses Stuart, who correctly says: “...whenever the Scriptures speak of wine as a comfort, a blessing, or a libation to God, and rank it with such articles as corn and oil, they mean, they can only mean, such wine as contained no alcohol that could have a mischievous tendency; that whenever they denounce it, and connect it with drunkenness and reveling, they can only mean alcoholic or intoxicating wine.”

The word “wine” simply refers to the juice of the grape. Whether it means fermented wine, which could make one drunk, or unfermented wine, which would not make one drunk, depends upon the context. For example, Isaiah 65:8 says: *“As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, ‘Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.’”* The context makes it very clear that unfermented wine is being spoken of. The cluster refers to the grapes which are still on the vine. It is not possible they could be fermented, and, therefore, intoxicating, while the juice was still in the grapes on the vine. The Bible is filled with warnings of the dangers of drinking intoxicating wine. The wise man wrote,

“Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? Who hath complaining? who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; They that go to seek out mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, When it sparkleth in the cup, When it goeth down smoothly: At the last it biteth like a serpent, And stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange things, And thy heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, Or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not hurt; They have beaten me, and I felt it not: When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again” (Proverbs 23:29-35).

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the wicked rulers of his day: *“Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink; that justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him”* (Isaiah 5:22-23). Isaiah also condemned the shameful conduct of the priests and prophets in his day: *“And even these reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink...”* (Isaiah 28:7-8). The prophet Habakkuk said: *“Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness”* (Habakkuk 2:15)!

In the New Testament, there are many strong condemnations of drunkenness. In 1 Corinthians 5:11, 13, Paul wrote: *“but as it is, I wrote unto you not to keep*

company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat...Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul lists the sins of which the Corinthians had been guilty before they became Christians. Drunkards are listed along with fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, extortioners, and revilers. Those who are guilty of these things, “shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

In the list of the “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-21, “drunkenness, revellings, and such like” are included along with such sins as adultery, fornication and murder. It is clearly said: “they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Some have argued that it is all right to drink as long as one does not get drunk. However, Ephesians 5:18 says: “*And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit.*” According to *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, the verb which is translated “be not drunken” actually means “Do not begin to be softened” with wine. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines this verb as “to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process of the state expressed in μεθύω), to become intoxicated...” In other words, Paul is saying, “**Do not even begin the process of becoming drunk.**” (See also Luke

12:45 and 1 Thessalonians 5:7). Since the process of becoming drunk begins with the first drink, then one is forbidden to take even one drink of an alcoholic beverage.

It is a well known fact that people do many evil things while drinking. Hundreds of people are injured and die every day in motorcar accidents which are caused by drunk drivers. Many violent crimes are committed by those who have been drinking. Drinking alcohol contributes to many of the major health problems facing us today such as heart disease and cancer.

One who wishes to please God will not drink any alcoholic drink, in any amount, for any purpose, at any time! Remember, the process of becoming drunk begins with the first drink. Those who are guilty of drunkenness cannot go to Heaven!



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