

TO DRINK OR
NOT
TO DRINK

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Bracketed comments following some scriptures assist the reader in understanding the intended meaning of these verses

We acknowledge the additional works of the various Scholars and Bible Commentaries used in conjunction with the College material. This is not to say that we agree with all their theology, but we certainly value their contribution to the Body of Christ.

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TO DRINK OR NOT TO DRINK

The subject of alcohol and whether, as Christians, we should or should not drink, has long been a topic of debate in many Christian circles. Let us look at the Word of God for our answers.

EPHESIANS 5:18 And be not drunk with wine (speaks of being controlled by alcoholic beverage, which Paul desires to use as an example), wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit (being controlled by the Spirit constantly, moment by moment). (E.S.B.)

The Bible tells us not to be drunk, not to be in “excess” but to be filled with the Spirit. This means to be controlled by the Spirit of God and not to be controlled by anybody else or anything else, including alcohol and mind-altering drugs. Of course for medical purposes and the benefit of a patient, a doctor may use drugs. Obviously this is not to use drugs in an improper way.

The past for many Christians could be summed up as Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:1-4:

1 PETER 4:1 Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh (through the Atonement), arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he who has suffered in the flesh (won the battle over the flesh) has ceased from sin;

1 PETER 4:2 That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh (in this earthly life) to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

1 PETER 4:3 For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles (this means before we were saved), when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries (these are works of the flesh - Galatians 5:19-21):

1 PETER 4:4 Wherein they (your former friends and associates) think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you (one form of persecution - 2 Timothy 3:12)

Therefore the Bible is quite clear that in regard to alcohol, we are not to be drunk, i.e. to drink to excess. We could try to determine what would constitute “excess.” Alternatively we could assume that we could drink just a little, let’s say a glass of wine with our meals. What would we then be doing? In this case, we would be saying by our actions that it is an acceptable Christian practice to drink alcohol.

“. . .The Bible is quite clear that in regard to alcohol, we are not to be drunk, i.e. to drink to excess. . .”

If someone were then to ask you if you drink alcohol, you would have to answer “Yes.” If they then asked whether it is okay, as a Christian, to drink alcohol, you would have to answer, because of the example you are setting and therefore your underlying belief, “Yes, but in moderation.”

This may sound both reasonable and wise. However let us take this issue a little further in terms of its analysis and possible effect on others.

What if, from your standpoint of drinking in moderation, you speak to a newly converted Christian who has, as many others in this generation, a past that has been filled with alcohol abuse - binge drinking in particular. Upon receiving your counsel they then set out to drink in moderation. They start with one or two glasses, but through the weakness of the flesh, they do not stop. They would then have failed to achieve the goal of “moderation” and would have entered into “excess.” In this case, through your sanction of drinking in moderation, you would have placed a stumbling block in front of this person - and possibly many other Christians as well.

Certainly this particular individual is responsible for his actions as we all are. However in this hypothetical case you would have supported their weakness, however unknowingly, by assuring them that it is acceptable to drink in moderation provided they are still

“sober” and not “given to wine” (1 Timothy 3:2-3). Better to consider it preferable not to drink at all rather than to put a stumbling block in front of anyone!

“. . .The doctrine of “moderate drinking” never addresses the love of one’s fellowman, only the love of self and self-indulgence. . .”

Think about it! If everybody had good self-control, and after salvation we were all able to follow the leading of the Spirit without wavering, then there would not be a problem. But as we know, many have been weakened in the area of self-control in relation to alcohol. Through sin, habit, or bad genetics - it does not matter. However such individuals need no encouragement to test their resolve in this area. The answer is always repentance and gaining empowerment to live one’s life according to the will of God.

Many people have abused their bodies with alcohol to the point where a chemical addiction or an emotional addiction has been produced. Upon salvation, man is changed in his spiritman, but his body and mind are a different matter. As Christians we know only too well that ongoing work is needed in regard to sanctification, for we will always remain “a work in progress.” Ongoing sanctification is required to bring a man’s condition to his position in Christ.

To be considered here is the weakness of the flesh in many Christians, weakness that would cause them to fall headlong into hell’s grip through alcohol. There are individuals who seemingly do not have the willpower, the self-control, to stop after a few drinks - for whatever the reason. As loving and caring Christians, we should take every opportunity to safeguard and help protect brothers and sisters who have this potential weakness. And who is to know who is weak in this area? Some Christians who may fall into this sin of “excess” have possibly never abused their bodies with alcohol in the past and may never have even been drunk in their lives. Who is to know, and it is far better to err on the side of caution in this matter than to plough ahead with no regard for others. The doctrine of

“moderate drinking” never addresses the love of one’s fellowman, only the love of self and self-indulgence.

If drunkenness becomes a way of life, this is one of the sins the Word of God explicitly warns us about this type of sin that will fast-track a Christian into forfeiting their salvation through unbelief (Hebrews 3:12-14), whereby denying Jesus’ Lordship. Scripture tells us clearly that one’s name can be blotted out of the Lamb’s Book of Life (Exodus 32:32-33).

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

1 CORINTHIANS 6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God.

REV 3:5 He who overcomes (by being in Christ), the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.

Love should guide all our actions, not the dictates of our flesh - our self-desires and wants. Concern for the welfare of our fellowman should, with God’s help, be our priority in all things. We should never allow a stumbling block to be set in place because of the way we live or what we do or say. Let it never be said of us in this life or the next that after becoming a Christian, we in any way have caused or helped cause the demise of another.

Is it love or lust by which we rule our lives in this area that we are studying? It will not be love if what we do, as we have discussed, may cause another to stumble and perhaps even fall from the grace of salvation. In the knowledge of this fact, would this then not be a sin against our brother? If we allow God to give us the grace we need to live in love, we will consider what we do not just from a personal perspective but from the standpoint of being a witness and an example to others. And some of these others may not

be strong in the faith or may have a weakness based on the past, as we have said, or even a weakness of which no-one is aware.

***“. . .Love should guide all our actions,
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desires and wants. . .”***

Consider if the other is our son or daughter, our grandson or granddaughter, etc. How can we really know their potential response to alcohol, and the justification they may embrace if they see us drinking? Will they allow the intoxicating influences of alcohol to lure them to a point beyond “being sober” ? We simply cannot know whether children may have a weakness in this area. If you think seriously about it, you would not want to contribute toward their demise, and ultimately to help them descend into hell itself through your indulgence - even the example of a glass of wine with a meal!

To drink or not to drink (in moderation) should not really be about us, but about us thinking of, and being considerate towards, and protective of, others. This is God’s love at work, in and through us. This is only one example in life whereby we can influence others so that, as a result, they may harm themselves. When this is the case, it is something we must seriously consider.

Some say that because Jesus turned water into wine, drinking alcohol must be acceptable. Let us look at the word “wine” in the New Testament. The Greek word for wine can refer to either grape juice itself or wine, whether fermented or unfermented. The only way to know what is being described is to check the surrounding context, and then to interpret the word in the light of the whole Biblical context.

If we examine texts such as John 2:1-10 and John 4:4-6 which describe the wedding at Cana, and still cannot see clearly that it was fermented wine, then it is probably wise, in light of that which we have discussed, to consider it to be unfermented wine. Certainly unfermented wine of this period was commonly called “good wine” - nourishing and free from the corruption of fermentation. We could not see Jesus doing something that would cause people to become drunk!

Scripture directs us accordingly:

ROMANS 14:21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak (the idea is that love is to be the ruling guide, not our freedom or liberties). (E.S.B.)

The point is that we have liberties and can do certain things as Christians. However, if these liberties were in any way to assist another brother or sister to fall into sin, it would be better and indeed right for us not to embrace such liberties. To take a personal example, if it be okay as a Christian to drink a glass of wine with our evening meal, for the benefit of others it would be better if we did not. As we have said, this is the case because history and present-day problems with people and alcohol have taught us that many Christians have, in fact, stumbled into the sin of drunkenness. Many others have also fought against the bondage of alcohol addiction and what it involves, namely a lowering of moral restraints and standards of decency. Excess alcohol consumption can lead not only to drunkenness but also, when an opportunity presents itself, promiscuous sexual behaviour, etc.

“...To drink or not to drink (in moderation) should not really be about us, but about us thinking of, and being considerate towards, and protective of, others...”

For some people, even two or three glasses of wine will result in a lowering of inhibitions that would cause them to do and say things they would not normally do or say if not under the influence of alcohol. Certainly alcohol can cause people not to count the cost, and not to retain their personal moral boundaries. As good parents, we would want our son or daughter to be wise in all their actions and

consider the ramifications of all their words and behaviour. Alcohol can compromise this process in all kinds of settings, from socialising with a peer group, to family interactions, to work and business associations. We are to be clear-headed and not influenced or weakened in the mind in regard to our communication with others and also our actions concerning others.

One or two glasses may or may not affect a person in this area. Age, one's sex, whether one has an empty stomach, body size, etc., all contribute to the effect that alcohol may or may not have on an individual. The general rule, however, is that more alcohol leads to a greater lowering of inhibitions, and who knows what will happen when a person's checks and balances are not working properly.

The scriptures continually urge us as Christians to be "*sober*," e.g. Titus 1:6-8, 2:2-6; 1 Timothy 3:2; 11; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7.

1 PETER 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour

To be "*sober*" in this scriptural context means to be serious, earnest, level-headed, to show no excessive or extreme emotion or prejudice, to be self-controlled, clear-headed, self-possessed, to be in one's "right mind," to think clearly and to use common sense.

To be "*sober*" is thus to have a clear and sound mind, in other words, to have proper self-control, to be mentally alert and circumspect. Doing anything that would cause the Christian to be weakened in this area is wrong and therefore a sin. Alcohol can help cause us not to be sober minded, as we have discussed.

“. . . Many others have also fought against the bondage of alcohol addiction and what it involves, namely a lowering of moral restraints and standards of decency. . . ”

One could say that such sins as resentment, gossip, and selfishness etc., are bad examples and could cause many to turn away

from the faith. If these sins are in a Christian's life, they will indeed be a negative influence upon others, and to practise sins of this nature will very likely cause a stumbling block to be placed in some people's lives. As the scriptures tell us, sin should not be present in our lives as it was before we were saved (1 Peter 2:11; 4:2; Romans 6:6; Galatians 5:16). Sin should not be in our lives not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of others. For example, a Christian father should be an example to his son or daughter of God's grace at work in his life.

Looking at all these things that may cause another to stumble in their Christian walk, we could probably say it is far easier for most people not to drink than, for example, to stop gossiping or being selfish, or resenting people who have wronged them. Unless one had a drinking problem, it would be far easier to address the drinking issue than some of these other sins. One just has to see the problem and make a clear and definite decision.

We deal with other issues in other studies. In this section, however, we are mainly addressing the issue of whether or not a Christian should drink, so it is really only in the light of this subject that we are applying the principle of the stumbling block. In other words, while we recognise that other stumbling blocks obviously exist, we are not addressing them directly here. We are only saying that comparatively speaking, the stumbling block of alcohol consumption is a simple issue to rectify.

The Biblical principle of the stumbling block can be related to many other areas of our life - our actions and our speech. Basically to apply this principle (of not allowing a stumbling block to be created by what we do or do not do) requires the grace of the love of God to empower us in all that we do and do not do, as ambassadors of Christ. This principle highlights the responsibility that is laid at our feet to care for our fellowman. As Jesus taught, we have a responsibility to not just love ourselves but also our neighbour (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31).

Again, it is not to be just about us but about the welfare of others. To have this mindset we need the Spirit of truth and power in our lives, governing our thinking. In other words, we need God's direction and empowerment on a daily basis, afforded to us as we yield to His will in our lives and believe for the grace required (Philippians 2:12-13).

“. . . Basically to apply this principle (of not allowing a stumbling block to be created by what we do or do not do) requires the grace of the love of God to empower us in all that we do and do not do, as ambassadors of Christ. . .”

Summing it up then, it would be far better for others that a Christian’s response to the question “Do you drink?” should be “No, I do not drink and I would advise all Christians to do likewise.” Why? “Out of consideration and love for others, I will not be an instrument used to cause a stumbling block to be placed in front of the life of another.”

Note: Whether you are a normal Christian or a Five Fold Minister of the Gospel, the same rule of love should govern your actions. There is no difference, for we are all in Christ and are His representatives, hopefully drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit to flow in the standard of His love, day by day, to His glory. Amen.

So let us not be unwise but wise, not being an instrument to causing another to stumble but rather having love one for another, in the power of God's Divine energies and graces.

May you have the victory in Christ. Amen!

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