**Alcohol, “Social Drinking,” and the Christian (1)**

*What does the Bible say about alcohol? Is “social drinking” – drinking in moderation – authorized for Christians?*

**Introduction**

1. “Total alcoholic beverage sales in the United States amounted to approximately 219.52 billion U.S. dollars in 2015.” (via Statista)
   1. Alcohol is big business in the US and the world.
   2. Alcohol consumption is socially accepted. It is a norm in our society.
   3. However, are Christians to take part in the socially accepted consumption of alcohol? (***cf. Romans 12:2 – “do not be conformed to this world”***)
2. This lesson, along with two others, will consider the topic of alcohol consumption on a Biblical level.
3. **The Bible does not authorize the consumption of alcohol. To do so is to sin against God.**
4. Alcohol and its Destructive Nature
5. What is alcohol?
   1. **Proverbs 20:1** – To be led astray by it shows your folly.
      1. Personification of ***“wine”*** and ***“strong drink.”*** (**Alcoholic beverage**)
      2. **Mocker** – because the one who is under its influence scoffs at that which is pure and holy.
      3. **Brawler** – because the one who is under its influence has his inhibitions lowered, and is susceptible to outbursts of wrath and immorality.
   2. **Proverbs 23:29-35** – Alcohol is destructive. It should not even be looked upon with desire to partake of it.
      1. It causes impairment of the mind.
      2. This leads to harm.
   3. Alcohol is no harmless substance.
      1. The federal government classifies ethyl alcohol (that which is in alcoholic beverages) as a drug. (*Alcohol: Some Questions and Answers* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981), p. 3)
         1. “Alcohol is classified pharmacologically as an anesthetic. The predominant characteristic of an anesthetic is a progressive descending depression of the central nervous system. In varying dosages, alcohol may act as an analgesic, a soporific, as anesthetic, a narcotic, or a hypnotic.” (Raymond Gerald McCarthy, ed. *Drinking and Intoxication* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959), p. 26).
         2. These effects are the reason people consume alcohol.
         3. **Cf. Galatians 5:19-21** – works of the flesh – sorcery.
            1. **Sorcery** – *pharmakeia* – the use or the administering of drugs. (Strong)
            2. “In sorcery, the use of drugs, whether simple or potent, was generally accompanied by incantations and appeals to occult powers, with the provision of various charms, amulets, etc., professedly designed to keep the applicant or patient from the attention and power of demons, but actually to impress the applicant with the mysterious resources and powers of the sorcerer.” (W.E. Vine)
            3. **Twofold** – influence of drugs, and appeal to false gods and false religious practices. ***(“Witchcraft”*** – KJV)
            4. **(v. 21)** – will not inherit kingdom.
      2. **Alcohol is a poison.**
         1. **Alcohol** – intoxicating beverage.
         2. **Toxic** – containing or being poisonous material.
         3. To intoxicate means to poison.
6. Alcohol’s Destructive Nature
   1. “Drinking too much can harm your health. Excessive alcohol use led to approximately 88,000 deaths and 2.5 million years of potential life lost (YPLL) each year in the United States from 2006 – 2010, shortening the lives of those who died by an average of 30 years. Further, excessive drinking was responsible for 1 in 10 deaths among working-age adults aged 20-64 years. The economic costs of excessive alcohol consumption in 2010 were estimated at $249 billion, or $2.05 a drink.” (<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm>)
   2. Short term health risks (ibid.):
      1. Injuries, such as motor vehicle crashes, falls, drownings, and burns.
      2. Violence, including homicide, suicide, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence.
      3. Alcohol poisoning, a medical emergency that results from high blood alcohol levels.
      4. Risky sexual behaviors, including unprotected sex or sex with multiple partners. These behaviors can result in unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.
      5. Miscarriage and stillbirth or fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) among pregnant women.
   3. Long term health risks (ibid.):
      1. High blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, and digestive problems.
      2. Cancer of the breast, mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, and colon.
      3. Learning and memory problems, including dementia and poor school performance.
      4. Mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.
      5. Social problems, including lost productivity, family problems, and unemployment.
      6. Alcohol dependence, or alcoholism.
   4. ***“Whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). “Do not look on the wine” (Proverbs 23:31).***
   5. “The Dietary Guidelines for Americans defines moderate drinking as up to 1 drink (0.6 oz of pure alcohol) per day for women and up to 2 drinks per day for men. In addition, **the Dietary Guidelines do not recommend that individuals who do not drink alcohol start drinking for any reason.”** (Ibid.)
      1. *There are times when the truth is right before us, but because of preconceived notions, ulterior motives, and fleshly desires we cannot see it.*
      2. **Cf. Matthew 16:1-4** – We should not be like the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Recognized signs of weather, but refused to recognize the signs of Jesus’ miracles.)
      3. **Both scripture, and secular sources show the danger of alcohol, and the need to abstain from it.**
   6. “There are some people who should ***not*** drink any alcohol, including those who are:…Driving, planning to drive, **or participating in other activities requiring skill, coordination, and alertness.**” (Ibid.)
      1. This describes the call of Christ – ***“walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Ephesians 4:1).***
      2. **Cf. 1 Peter 5:8** – The devil is seeking us out, so we must be sober and vigilant.
         1. Connection between ***“Be sober,”*** and ***“seeking whom he may devour.”***
         2. **Sober** – *nēphō* – from *ne* (not) and *piein* (to drink). (*do not drink; do not swallow down – word means abstain from wine*)
         3. **Devour** – *katapinō* – from *kata* (down) and *piein* (to drink). (*to drink down – swallow down*)
         4. **Do not swallow down wine (or intoxicating beverage), or the devil will swallow you down! (consume you as you consumed the wine, and because you consumed the wine)**
   7. ***What other recreational activity is commended and authorized, even encouraged, by God in scripture that has comparable negative effects on individuals, family, society, etc.? – There isn’t one.***
7. Wine in the Bible
8. Translated Words
   1. Hebrew (OT) three most prominent terms:
      1. **Yayin** – wine, either fermented or unfermented.
         1. **Nehemiah 5:18** – all sorts of wine.
         2. **Genesis 49:11** – freshly pressed – blood of the grape.
         3. **Jeremiah 40:10** – still in the cluster – along with summer fruit – reference to grapes.
         4. **Proverbs 23:31** – obviously by context fermented wine.
      2. **Tirosh** – must or fresh grape juice (as just squeezed out); by implication (rarely) fermented wine. (Strong)
         1. ***“You will sow but you will not reap. You will tread the olive but will not anoint yourself with oil; And the grapes, but you will not drink wine.” (Micah 6:15***, NASB; ***“vintage”*** ASV)
            1. ***“grapes”*** – tirosh; ***“wine”*** – yayin.
            2. **As the olive was the natural source of the oil, the grape (tirosh) was the natural source of the wine (yayin).**
         2. **Isaiah 65:8** – found in the cluster. ***(“new wine”***)
      3. **Shekar** – ‘sweet drink’ expressed from fruits other than the grape, and drunk in an unfermented or fermented state.
         1. **Deuteronomy 14:26** – wine and SIMILAR DRINK.
         2. **Proverbs 20:1** – Strong drink.
            1. This is an obvious reference to intoxicating beverage.
            2. **However, this is not the same “strong drink” as the distilled liquors of today.**
            3. **The distilling process was developed during the ninth or tenth century in Arabia.**
   2. Greek (NT) most prominent term:
      1. **Oinos** – a generic term for wine, either fermented or unfermented.
         1. Usually used in place of *yayin* in the LXX (Septuagint).
         2. **General term like *ekklēsia*:**
            1. **A calling out; an assembly.**
            2. **Acts 2:47** (the church); **19:32** (assembly – riot at Ephesus that Demetrius stirred up).
      2. **Gleukos** – “new wine” – produced from the purest juice of the grape, which flowed spontaneously from the grape before the treading began.
9. Contrasted uses (shows that “wine” is ultimately generic, and context must determine whether it is fermented or not)
   1. ***Blessing*** – **Psalm 104:14-15** (speaking of what God does for man in His creation); ***Cursing*** – **Habakkuk 2:15**.
   2. ***Cheers God and men*** – **Judges 9:13**; ***Is a mocker*** – **Proverbs 20:1**.
   3. ***Spiritual blessing*** – **Isaiah 55:1**; ***Divine wrath*** – **Psalm 60:3** (figuratively)
   4. **Conclusion – Wine is spoken of positively and negatively in scripture. There is an obvious distinction between that which is fermented (alcoholic) and that which is not.**
10. No Prevention Argument

*NOTE: From before, this argument that there was no way of preventing fermentation in antiquity, and therefore the wine they consumed was always fermented, is invalidated. There are obvious references to unfermented wine in scripture.*

1. Fermentation
   1. **Vinous fermentation – alcohol**
   2. Acetous fermentation – vinegar
   3. Lactic fermentation – souring in milk
   4. **Process of Vinous Fermentation:**
      1. In grape juice – sugar and gluten.
         1. **Sugar** – carbon, hydrogen, oxygen.
         2. **Gluten** – carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen.
            1. **Nitrogen leads to the decay of gluten which leads to the reception of yeast germs (necessary for fermentation).**
            2. **In the presence of yeast, sugar is gradually converted to alcohol.**
         3. *Several ways in antiquity to preserve grape juice in a state which kept this process from happening. 🡪*
2. Preventing Fermentation
   1. **Gluten Separation**
      1. **Gluten** – located in the skin, and envelope of the seed.
      2. Needed for fermentation.
      3. Separate the gluten, and prevent fermentation.
      4. **Fermentable pulp was strained out by filters.**
   2. **Moisture Removal**
      1. No fermentation without the presence of water.
      2. Boil the juice down to a syrup to preserve, add water later to drink.
      3. **NOTE: grape juice boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit and ethyl alcohol evaporates at 172 degrees Fahrenheit – if there was alcohol, after boiling the juice it was expelled.**
   3. **Air Exclusion**
      1. Exclusion of air from the juice prevents fermentation.
      2. **Filled containers with fresh juice, or the syrup from the moisture removal method, sealed the container and sunk it in water, or buried it in the ground.**
      3. ***Columella, a secular writer in antiquity, said of such, “It will thus remain sweet for a whole year.” (Columella, De Re Rustica 12. 29.)***
   4. **Reduced Temperature**
      1. Fermentation prevented at temperatures below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.
      2. **Pliny, a writer in antiquity, stated, “As soon as the must (syrup from boiling) is taken from the vat and put into casks, they plunge the casks in water till midwinter passes and regular cold weather sets in.” (Pliny, *Natural History* 14. 11.)**
   5. **Sulphur Fumigation**
      1. **Filling jars half-way with juice, and burning sulphur, filling the rest of the jar with sulphur fumes.**
      2. Killed the yeast.
      3. Absorbed the oxygen.
      4. **Frederick R. Lees stated, “When the Mishna** (Jewish oral traditions – the Talmud) **forbids smoked wines from being used in offerings (Menachoth, VIII, 6, et. Comment), it has chiefly reference to the Roman practice of fumigating them with sulphur, the vapor which absorbed the oxygen, and thus arrested the fermentation.” (Frederick R. Lees, “Wine,” in *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, 2:956.)**
   6. ***These preventative methods were often combined, ensuring the preservation of UNFERMENTED WINE.***
3. ***Why is the Bible not more specific on which wine is being discussed (fermented or unfermented) so there is no mistake concerning its nature?***
4. **The Bible is not a dissertation on alcohol any more than it is on dancing, modesty, gambling, etc.**
5. It sets forth general principles and wisdom which guide us in righteous and holy living as children of God.
6. **Proverbs 4:5-7** – Our desire should be for wisdom and understanding. It is the principle thing.
   1. We must come to know God’s teaching, and gain wisdom, the proper understanding of the application of such knowledge.
   2. We get this from God’s word – ***“we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7)***.
7. **Hebrews 5:14** – We need to reach that full age – maturity.
   1. Our learning, and use of such attained knowledge should cause us to arrive at the place of discernment which perceives the evil of alcohol consumption.
   2. **Are we mature enough to discern both good and evil of “wine” in the Bible? Not all is good, and not all is bad. Fermented wine is obviously condemned.**
8. **The one who cannot see the evil and danger in even the moderate consumption of alcohol is impaired by natural and carnal thinking – *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).***

**Conclusion**

1. The Bible’s use of wine in both positive/sanctioning ways, along with negative/condemning ways shows that fermented drink (alcohol) is not permitted.
2. It does not make sense to conclude that while God said, ***“Do not look on the wine” (Proverbs 23:31),*** He allows the moderate consumption of such a dangerous substance.
3. One cannot suggest that “wine” is always fermented, for the words translated into wine in the OT and NT are generic, meaning fermented or unfermented. (Context determines)
4. It is well documented that there were ways in antiquity to preserve wine fresh, thus preventing fermentation. Just because “wine” is mentioned in a scripture, it does not mean it was alcoholic.
5. **Revealed Divine wisdom demands the conclusion that fermented drink, thus alcoholic drink, is not authorized for consumption. (EVEN ON A MODERATE “SOCIAL DRINKING” LEVEL.)**
6. Further lessons will investigate this concept to a greater degree.