**Alcohol, “Social Drinking,” and the Christian (3)**

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

**Introduction**

1. The last lesson in this series gave time to answering appeals to various passages in the New Testament to justify social drinking. There is no passage in the Bible which can be used to authorize “social,” or moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages.
2. The searching of scripture for the validation of “social drinking” is vain.
3. The honest individual searching scripture to determine the Bible’s teaching about alcohol will be convinced of its prohibition.
4. What does the Bible say about alcohol, and the Christian?
5. Drunkenness – a matter of degree.

**Argument:** The Bible condemns drunkenness, but it does not condemn moderate drinking.

**Assumption:** Drunkenness is a single stage reached. Drinking in moderation is not drunkenness. (However, if this is the case, then at what point is a person who was “not drunk” after beginning to drink is made “drunk?”) (Varying factors producing inconsistency – weight, food, strength of drink, etc.)

**Drunkenness is a matter of degree.**

1. Secular Proof
   1. **Drunk** – having the faculties impaired by alcohol. (Webster’s)
   2. **Drunkenness** – the state of being intoxicated; intoxication. (New Oxford American Dictionary)
   3. **Intoxication** – the condition of having physical or mental control markedly diminished by the effects of alcohol or drugs. (Webster’s)
   4. *In other words, drunkenness, or intoxication BEGINS (it is a process, a matter of degree, not a state) when there is enough alcohol in the blood to affect and impair physical and/or mental control.*
   5. **Drunkenness is not a state, but a matter of degree (a process).**
      1. A noted toxicologist – “The higher nerve functions of the forebrain, such as reasoning, judgment, and social restraint are impaired by very low concentrations of alcohol in the blood.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1959 ed., s.v. “Drunkenness,” by Clarence Weinert Muehlberger, p. 683)
      2. Dr. Rolla N. Harger – “Within two or three minutes after a few sips of whiskey or beer are swallowed, alcohol can be detected in the blood.” (Rolla N. Harger, “The Sojourn of Alcohol in the Body,” in *Alcohol Education for Classroom and Community*, ed. Raymond Gerald McCarthy (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1964), p. 79)
      3. Dr. Donald L. Gerard – “There is a general sequence of events which commonly occurs when a sober person begins to drink alcoholic beverages. These events are expressions of the degree to which a person has lost control over his speech, emotional expression, and motor behavior. The rate at which this effect takes place is related to the quantity of alcohol ingested, to the rapidity of absorption, and to the body weight of the drinker. With the first few ‘social’ drinks, the individual’s judgment and inhibitions are affected.” (Donald L. Gerard, “Intoxication and Addiction,” in *Drinking and Intoxication*, ed. Raymond Gerald McCarthy (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959), p. 27)
   6. **Moderate drinking = moderate intoxication** (alcohol – intoxicating beverage).
      1. If there was “responsible” drinking (Commercials – “drink responsibly”), then moderate drinking would be it.
      2. However, is there “responsible” intoxication? Certainly not!
      3. It is impossible to “drink responsibly.”
2. Scriptural Proof
   1. **Galatians 5:21** – **drunkenness** – *methē*; an intoxicant, i.e. (by implication) intoxication. (STRONG)
      1. The word does not specify as to the degree of intoxication, although context may suggest a degree of intoxication.
         1. Is alcohol an intoxicant? Yes.
         2. In moderate drinking, is an intoxicant consumed? Yes.
         3. Then moderate drinking is “drunkenness.”
      2. **Any degree of intoxication is drunkenness – is sinful – and *“those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21b).***
   2. **Ephesians 5:18** – It says ***“do not be drunk,”*** thus, does not condemn moderate drinking? (*NOTE: Condemnation of excess does not authorize moderation.*)
      1. **Drunk** – *methuskō* – signifies to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process of the state expressed in “*methuō* – to be drunk with wine”), to become intoxicated. (Vine) (The beginning of the process of drunkenness.)
      2. **Drunkenness is intoxication, and the Bible says it is sin. Ephesians 5:18 says not to begin the process of intoxication.**
      3. ***“with wine, in which is dissipation”*** – *asōtia* – denotes "prodigality, profligacy, riot" (from ***a***, negative, and ***sozo***, "to save") (Vine)
         1. ***“excess” (KJV)*** – reference to results from wine, not quantity of wine. (Modifies “wine,” not “drunk.”)
         2. **Results?** – *asōtia* – unsavedness – drinking wine leads to a dissolute, immoral life.
         3. So much so that Paul says that DISSIPATION IS IN THE WINE – ***“with wine, IN WHICH is dissipation.”***
         4. *To suggest that moderate drinking of such a beverage* ***“in which is dissipation”*** *is to contradict the context of* ***Ephesians 5!***
            1. **(vv. 11-14)** – No fellowship with darkness! Awake from moral and spiritual sleep to the light!
            2. **Moderate drinking = moderation in dissipation, or DARKNESS.**
            3. **(vv. 10, 15-17)** – to walk wisely, and find out what God’s will is.
            4. **(vv. 17-18)** – a contrast is made:

To understand God’s will THAT WE MAY DO IT.

Do not begin to drink because such is antithetical to the goal to understand.

Rather, filled with the Spirit (**cf. Colossians 3:16** – **“word of Christ”**) – will lead to understanding God’s will, and doing it.

DRINKING ALCOHOL AT ALL IS CONTRADICTORY TO THE VERY PASSAGE.

* + 1. **The Bible condemns the first sip of alcoholic beverage because of what it leads to. It must start somewhere, and God naturally condemns even the start.**

1. Degrees of Drunkenness Condemned (From the least, to the greatest.)
   1. **Romans 13:13** – Walk properly, not in – revelry and drunkenness.
      1. **Revelry** – *kōmos* – "a revel, carousal," the concomitant and consequence of drunkenness. (VINE)
         1. “A nocturnal and riotous procession of half drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honour of Bacchus or some other deity, and sing and play before houses of male and female friends; hence used generally of feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry.” (THAYER)
         2. ***“half drunken” “drinking parties…protracted till late”*** – Not the most extreme degree of drunkenness to the total loss of control.
         3. **Inebriated enough to feel in control, but with enough lowering of the inhibitions to participate in revelry.**
      2. **Drunkenness** – *methē* – intoxication; drunkenness (THAYER)
         1. “To be pretty well drunk.” (LIDDELL-SCOTT)
         2. **Cause and Effect** – *kōmos* (greater) follows *methē* (lesser) insofar as the degree of drunkenness goes, and that which accompanies the drunkenness (revelry).
         3. **Same format with** – **“lewdness”** (greater, *koitē*) and **“lust”** (lesser, *aselgeia*); **“strife”** (greater, eris) and “envy” (lesser, *zēlos*).
      3. **Both include intoxication, but to a different degree.**
         1. **BOTH the lesser degree AND the greater degree is condemned.**
         2. **(vv. 11, 12, 14)** – Salvation is near, so cast off works of darkness (revelry and drunkenness), MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH.
         3. **Alcohol naturally makes provision for the flesh** – remember, ***“in which is dissipation” (Ephesians 5:18).***
   2. **1 Peter 4:3** – lusts of men/will of the gentiles – drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties.
      1. **A trio of words dealing with intoxication.**
      2. **Drunkenness** – *oinophlygia* – an overflow of wine. (STRONG)
         1. “It marks a step in advance of *methē* (to be pretty well drunk).” (TRENCH)
         2. Aristotle used the word to describe such an overflow of wine which would cause permanent harm to the body. (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* iii. 5. 15)
         3. **Greatest form of intoxication in this text.**
      3. **Revelries** – *kōmos* – as defined before. Used in **Romans 13:13** and **Galatians 5:21** – revelry.
         1. **Not the lowest level of intoxication.**
         2. Still a lower level to come. 🡪
      4. **Drinking parties** – *potos* – a drinking. (VINE; STRONG; THAYER)
         1. “the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium, not of necessity excessive…, but giving opportunity for excess.” (R.C. TRENCH)
         2. “It means properly drinking; an act of drinking; then a drinking bout; drinking together.” (Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, 1 Peter 4:3)
         3. “a social gathering at which wine was served” (BDAG)
            1. “In the Gr-Rom. world it was customary for literati to hold banquets at which topical discussions were featured, with participants well lubricated with wine (s. the dialogues of Pl. and esp. X., Symp.). These would not properly be rendered ‘carousals’.” (ibid.)
         4. **Lowest degree of intoxication in this text.**
         5. ***THIS IS THE CONCEPT OF “SOCIAL DRINKING,” AND IT IS CONDEMNED AS SIN! – Simply drinking intoxicating beverage.***
      5. **(vv. 1-2, 4-5)** – The list includes sins, the will of the Gentiles, and things which men will be judged for doing.
         1. NOTE: ***“flood of dissipation”***
         2. ***“wine, in which is dissipation” (Ephesians 5:18).***
2. **The Bible shows that drunkenness is a process, and any degree of it (any degree of intoxication) is sinful.** This can be understood with regard to the nature of wine – ***“in which is dissipation” (Ephesians 5:18).***
   1. **Such drink, even in “moderation,” affects the mind.**
   2. This leads to excess, and immorality.
   3. ***This jeopardizes the fundamental principles of being a Christian. 🡪***
3. Alcohol and the Christian
4. The Christian and Sobriety
   1. **1 Peter 1:13-14** – Christians are called to be ***“sober.” (nēphō)***
      1. This is an absolute necessity for living as God has called for us to live.
      2. **(v. 13)** – **(a)** is the decisive action of mind to do as God requires, thus being ready to do so, and **(b)** is the necessary constant state in which a Christian must be to accomplish what is set out to do.
      3. **(v. 14)** – In order to be obedient, and abstinent from sin, the Christian must be “sober.”
   2. **Sobriety in two forms:**
      1. **Physical sobriety** – *nēphō* – to abstain from wine. (STRONG)
         1. “to be free from the influence of intoxicants” (VINE)
         2. “to be sober, drink no wine” (LIDDELL-SCOTT)
      2. **Mental sobriety** – *sōphrōn* – safe in mind, i.e. self-controlled. (STRONG)
         1. (1) of a sound mind, sane, in one's senses; (2) curbing one's desires and impulses, self-controlled, temperate. (THAYER)
         2. Sobriety is that “habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on all the passions and desires, which would hinder the temptation to [fulfilling the passions and desires] from arising.” (Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 68.)
      3. **Not synonyms, but often used interchangeably.**
         1. Physical sobriety (abstinence from alcohol) = foundation to mental sobriety.
         2. **Mental sobriety cannot occur if there is not physical sobriety.**
      4. **Uses of both:**
         1. **1 Timothy 3:2** – qualifications of elders.
            1. ***“temperate”*** – *nēphalios* – from *nēphō*; abstaining from wine (THAYER). (**Positive qualification paralleled with negative qualification of *“not given to wine.”***)
            2. ***“sober-minded”*** – *sōphrōn* – safe in mind, i.e. self-controlled.
            3. **An elder is to be “safe in mind, i.e. self-controlled,” but in order to be such he must first be “abstaining from wine.”**
         2. **1 Peter 5:8** – Be sober, because the devil wants to devour you.
            1. ***“vigilant”*** – *grēgoreuō* – to keep awake, i.e. watch. (STRONG) (*Association of mental vigilance with physical abstinence 🡪)*
            2. ***“sober”*** – *nēphō* – to abstain from wine. (STRONG)

“There is a beauty in this verse, and striking apposition between the first and last words, which I think have not been noticed; - Be sober, ***nepsate***, from ***ne*** not, and ***piein,*** to drink – do not swallow down – and the word ***katapien***, from ***kata,*** down, and ***piein,*** to drink. If you swallow strong drink down, the devil will swallow you down. Hear this ye drunkards, topers, tipplers, or by whatsoever name ye are known in society, or among your fellow-sinners, strong drink is not only your way to the devil, but the devil’s way into you. Ye are such as the devil particularly may swallow down.” (Adam Clarke (n. 20), vol. 2, p. 869.)

* + - 1. **1 Thessalonians 5:5-10** – Christians are of the day/light, and are not to be caught up in darkness/night – immorality and sin.
         1. Sober – *nēphō* – physical sobriety being used in a figurative/spiritual sense.
         2. **We should not be in a spiritual/moral slumber** – THIS OCCURS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL – BE SOBER!
         3. **Our mental faculties must be at their best at all times, while we wait on the coming of our Lord, and work toward salvation!**
  1. **Christians are supposed to be “sober-minded,” thus, naturally and logically must be physically “sober,” i.e. abstaining from intoxicating beverage. (Abstinence is a word of TOTALITY.)**
  2. This is necessary to the end of holiness 🡪

1. The Christian and Holiness
   1. **1 Peter 1:13-16** – BE HOLY FOR I AM HOLY.
      1. **Positive** – consecrated to the service of God.
      2. **Negative** – separate from all sin.
      3. **Sobriety, both physical and mental, is necessary to be holy!**
   2. **1 Peter 2:4-5, 9** – holy priesthood, royal priesthood, holy nation.
      1. **(v. 11-12)** – Therefore, we are to live holily – abstaining from fleshly lusts.
      2. ***“Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:14).***
      3. ***“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation” (Ephesians 5:18).***
      4. **You are a HOLY nation, and ROYAL (kingly) PRIESTHOOD, and drinking alcohol in any amount jeopardizes this.**
         1. **Leviticus 10:8-11** (conduct prescribed for priests) – abstain from alcohol so you can DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE HOLY AND UNHOLY.
            1. They served ***“the copy and shadow of the heavenly things” – Hebrews 8:5!*** – We serve the FIGURE – the true!
            2. Instruction for ministering in the tabernacle – not always there (OT) **– Christians (NT) CONTINUALLY MINISTERING IN THE TRUE TABERNACLE.**
            3. **Right after Nadab and Abihu destroyed for profane worship – (vv. 1-3) – connection?**
         2. **Proverbs 31:4-5** – Intoxicating drink NOT for kings, lest they forget the law.
            1. Forget the law? – ***“Therefore DO NOT BE UNWISE, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17). 🡪***
            2. ***“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it IS NOT WISE” (Proverbs 20:1).***
   3. ***“Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).***
   4. ***“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” (Proverbs 23:31-32).***

**Conclusion**

1. There will always be those who, because of their love of the world, argue that “social drinking” is permitted.
2. **However, there is no way around the thoroughness of scripture on the subject, which obviously condemns the consumption of alcohol.**
3. **DO NOT BE DECEIVED! Alcohol is DANGEROUS! It will damage your body, and put you in harm’s way, and MOST TRAGICALLY IT WILL KILL YOUR SOUL!**
4. Christians are to avoid anything that would lead them to eternal destruction, and alcohol is one of those things.
5. **We are to be FREE FROM INTOXICANTS ENTIRELY – SOBER, and we are to be HOLY AS GOD IS HOLY!**