

Alcoholism and Drunkenness

In approaching any biblical doctrine, subjectivity, personal experience or prejudice must be set aside in order to properly evaluate the biblical viewpoint and to gain true biblical perspective. Those reared in a legalistic Christian background often relate alcohol to hell or to the devil. Those who have drinking problems are often looking for an excuse to pursue their besetting sin or weakness.

Drinking alcoholic beverage has long been an issue in the human race, as attested by the numerous references in the Bible. The Bible issues neither a license to drink nor a command to abstain from it. The Scripture comments only on the correct and incorrect use of alcohol along with its many variables. The decision to drink or not to drink is left to our volition.

Alcohol is harmful and beneficial, destructive and helpful, can be a curse and a blessing. Taken in moderate amounts, alcohol is beneficial for various medicinal purposes, such as arterial stimulation and blood circulation, and physical relaxation. Alcohol can be detrimental when used as a means of escape from reality, in a frantic search for happiness, or for licentious purposes as in addiction.

The Bible condemned drunkenness not drinking (Proverbs 23:20, Isa. 5:11, Rom. 13:13, Eph. 5:18). Drunkenness does not prove one's social superiority, manliness, or ability to hold one's liquor (Prov. 20:1, Isaiah 28:7-8, I Cor. 5:11). Addiction to alcohol is not only weakness of the soul but an entrapment to a form of slavery difficult to resolve.

Drunkenness incapacitates anyone, especially those in authority, that is it interferes with clear thinking, distorts judgment, suppresses norms and standards, and can lead to abuse of authority.

- Temporal authority such as kings, rulers, government leaders (Prov. 31:4-5)
- Spiritual authority of the local church such as pastors and deacons (1 Tim. 3:3, 8, Titus 1:7)
- Those in authority are not forbidden for taking alcohol, but they are commanded to be temperate in its use.

Drunkenness is condemned in some Bible characters like Noah (Gen.9:21), Lot (Gen. 19:32-36), Nabal (1 Samuel 25:36-37) and others. The name "Ephraim" which refers to the entire Northern Kingdom was used as a synonym to drunkenness because they have become a nation of alcoholics (Isaiah 28:1).

The excessive use of alcohol has adverse effects that lead to being impulsive, abusive, irresponsible behavior, and social tragedy. Social tragedy includes crime, suicide, traffic accidents, economic and industrial losses, loss of health, miserable circumstances, poverty, broken homes, marital separation or divorce, and national disaster. Alcohol is a depressant rather than a stimulant. As a depressant, it cooperates with the old sinful nature to lower the standards of resistance to sins in all categories.

Alcohol lowers inhibitions, dulls the reflexes, destroys common sense and good judgment, and spawns mental attitude sins. As a result, it is more likely for a drunken driver to kill, the drunken spouse to abuse, the drunken parent to abuse, the drunken boss to lose integrity, drunken men and women becomes promiscuous. This means that excessive drinking is not only a sin in itself, but invites spiritual, mental, and physical consequences. The Bible gives neither encouragement nor excuses for excessive drinking.

Habitual drunkenness or excessive use of alcohol can cause certain conditions and diseases like cerebral hemorrhage, delirium tremens producing mental confusion, anxiety, terror, auditory and visual hallucinations and delusions. Sometimes, drunkenness leads to a kind of psychosis where the brain is heavily damaged by alcohol and the victim becomes a pathological liar. Cirrhosis of the liver is well known among heavy drinkers.

Paralysis of the eyes, clouding of the consciousness, uncoordinated walks, and finally leads to comatose when alcohol has already destroyed brain tissues. The disease that results from heavy drinking is always complex and expensive.

There are two types of excessive drinking, and both are fatal:

- Drinking an inordinate amount at one time
- Steady drinking over a long period of time

The human body is capable of removing approximately one ounce of alcohol from the blood per hour. The deciding factor is the amount of alcohol in the blood not how much a person can assimilate alcohol. The bodies of many humans are incapable of filtering even a small amount of alcohol for a longer period of time to prevent inebriation and should avoid alcohol altogether.

While drinking in moderation is permitted, there are many believers who should abstain for health reasons. The percentage of unwashed alcohol in the blood becomes intoxication that produces diseases. The real issue in drinking is its power to captivate and trap the individual into addiction (Eph. 5:18b). The Bible also recorded examples of legitimate use of alcohol. It is medically beneficial for a dying person in the Old Testament times as pain reliever (Proverbs 31:6).

For some adults, it is useful to the brain and nervous system as a depressant to produce mild sedation (Prov. 31:7). The right amount of alcohol with proper meals helps in blood circulation by dilating the blood vessels. For the elderly, it stimulates the appetite (Psalm 104:15). It also helps in relaxing the nervous system and functions as anti-bacterial in some cases (1 Tim. 5:23).

There were three kinds of wine among the ancient Greeks, Romans and Jews in Palestine:

- Fermented wines, which, however, were very unlike our fiery liquors, and contained only a small per cent of alcohol. These were mixed with two or three parts of water.
- New wine, the fresh juice of the grape, like our new cider, not intoxicating.
- Wines in which, by boiling the unfermented juice of the grape, or by the addition of certain drugs, the process of fermentation was stopped, and which had no intoxicating properties.

Under the law of liberty, every legally and physically adult believer has the right to drink moderate amounts of alcoholic beverage, when an occasion calls for it, which the Bible did not regard or consider as a sin. However, under the law of expediency, the believer should not drink under witnessing conditions where drinking becomes an issue to the unbelievers. Under the law of love, the believer should refrain from drinking when there is danger of leading astray the weaker believers. Under the law of supreme sacrifice, a believer is forbidden to drink alcoholic beverage when his life is completely dedicated to a specific ministry or leadership function.

Alcoholic beverage is for adults only and young people have not gained sufficient wisdom to deal with alcohol or derive any benefits from drinking. Since the youth are vulnerable to the dangers of alcohol, they should never use it. Here are some advices on drinking:

- Drinking alcohol drinks when frustrated, lonely or problematic could only create more problems.
- It is always wise not to drink with strangers in strange places.
- Young ladies who are foolish enough to date with strangers should not drink alcoholic beverage.
- Drink moderately only with friends and relatives.
- Never drink alone, moderate drinking is part of the social life of those in cold climate.
- Never drink while on work wherever it might be.
- Never drink before or while operating a motor vehicle or any type of machinery.
- Never drink before or while handling firearms or weapons.
- Never drink without a reason to celebrate.
- Never drink for the sake of drinking.
- Never be in revelries (Gal. 5:23) and drinking parties (Esther 6:17, Daniel 5:10, Jer. 16:8).

Drunkenness and dissipation are not only a waste of time, money, and self-destruction, and is therefore forbidden in the Bible, since it is classified as sin. Drunkenness is addiction which is the lack of capacity to resist the temptation to drink. Alcohol is a weapon which Satan uses to enslave and control the lives of many.

In the Gospel of John, the account of turning the water into wine (John 2:1-11) implied several important truths that we have always missed:

- The Lord Jesus and Mary were not inconvenienced by the absence of wine (v.4)
- Their pleasure did not depend on alcoholic beverage
- The issue was the not social crisis, but who and what Christ is.
- The miracle neither condoned nor condemned drinking but focused on Christ.
- Drinking wine was customary to the Jews.

Drunkenness was one of the contributing factors for the fifth cycle of discipline executed by God against the nation of Israel (Isaiah 28:1-9, Joel 1:4-6).

The alcoholic Christian is under the control of his OSN and outside the plan and purpose of God. He cannot utilize the grace provision for learning and applying Bible doctrine, he is missing the blessing of God. He is a spiritual loser. Alcoholic believers must repent, starting with a rebound.



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