

The Christian and the Use of Alcohol #4

How do we apply the Biblical teaching to our modern situation?

Intro: In our previous studies we have considered the historical and cultural background of the Biblical texts about wine and strong drink, and we have looked at the meaning of the texts in their historical and cultural context. That is the first task of Bible study—to determine the meaning of the Biblical text to those to whom it was first written. The second task is to learn the meaning of the message for people today—the modern application.

Today would like to suggest some principles that would be helpful in knowing how to apply the Biblical texts in today's society.

We must recognize the great difference between the wine of the Biblical context and the wine of our modern world.

Justifying consumption of modern wines and spirits on the basis of the OT and NT consumption of wine and strong drink is not comparing apples with apples). In fact, there is a stark contrast between what God approved in the ancient world and what people today are doing. It's more like comparing grapes with grapefruit!

Ancient wines were commonly mixed with water, reducing the likelihood of intoxication. Today wine is commonly served unmixed, full strength.

Ancient wines might have had alcoholic content from 5-6%; its dilution ratio with water was based on its strength; the stronger the drink, the more it was diluted. The result would be a beverage with low alcoholic content (1-4%). Modern wines have an alcoholic content far greater and produce intoxication much quicker.

The alcohol content of a wine can range from a low of about 7% in a light German Riesling to about 17% in a monster late harvest Zinfandel. Fortified wines can go up to 21%. Most wines, however, have between 11% and 14%. (www.wine.com) Brandy, Gin, Vodka, Whiskey—40-50% alcohol

In fact in New Testament times one would need to drink twenty-two glasses of wine in order to consume the large amount of alcohol in two martinis today. Stein humorously notes, "In other words, it is possible to become intoxicated from wine mixed with three parts water, but one's drinking would probably affect the bladder long before the mind."

Ancient people had very limited choices in beverages. (Water was often impure and wine was often used to purify it). Preservation of other juices was quite difficult due to the lack of refrigeration and the time and cost of processing and preserving juices. Today there are abundant choices of beverages, including pure water, teas, soft drinks, and juices, all of which can be drunk without addiction or questionable influence.

When people today drink unmixed highly alcoholic wine and then use the Bible for justification, they are misusing the Bible! It is not a fair or logical comparison. A glass of unmixed wine today could have as much as 10 times the potency of a glass of mixed wine drunk in the Biblical culture!

We need to pay serious attention to the warnings concerning the dangers of wine and strong drink.

As we pointed out last week, there are numerous warnings concerning the dangers of wine and strong drink. Those warnings urge the reader to consider the effects that drinking larger amounts of wine and strong drink can have on the drinker. The dangers of drinking wine in excess results in:

Slowing of the thinking processes (Prov 31:4–5; Isa 28:7; Hos 4:11);

Stupor (Jer 25:27; 51:39);

Sickness (Isa 19:14; 28:7–8 ; Jer 48:26);

Staggering (loss of balance and mental control) (Job 12:25; Isa 28:7–8; 29:9);

Arrogance (Hab 2:5);

Forgetfulness (Prov 31:6–7);

Confusion and delirious dreams (Prov 23:31, 33); sleepiness (Gen 9:20–24; 19:33);

Lack of feeling (Prov 23:31, 35);

Bloodshot eyes (Prov 23:29–30);

Poverty (Prov 23:20–21).

Though these effects could be achieved by drinking relatively large amounts of the mixed Biblical wines, in this society they can be achieved by drinking relatively small amounts of the powerful wines and liquors commonly available for consumption. If God warned of the dangers of drinking those beverages, would not those warnings be amplified when one is using a beverage that is far more potent?

We need to recognize what the Bible explicitly condemns and make no provision for it!

The Bible explicitly condemns drunkenness

But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:11)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:21)

The Bible explicitly condemns participation in carousing and drinking parties.

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; (1 Peter 4:3-4)
Let's focus on two words:

Drunkenness translates "oinophlugia" which expresses the idea of extreme drunkenness, a debauch.

Carousing translates "komos".

kwimo", *ou m*; ***poito"***, *ou m*: *drinking parties involving unrestrained indulgence in alcoholic beverages and accompanying immoral behavior - 'orgy, revelling, carousing.'*

Trench distinguishes "komos" as combining the concepts of "riot and revelry".

Trench in his "Synonyms of the NT" indicates that "potos" refers to "the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium, not of necessity excessive, but giving opportunity for excess".

Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:13-14)

We need to pay careful attention to the effect of our example on others, especially young people, those with weak consciences, and the world about us.

Before a person decides to drink or to continue drinking, he should be fully aware of the following facts about alcoholic beverages and their effects today.

An estimated ten million problem drinkers or alcoholics are in the United States adult population.

Of adults who drink, 36 percent can be classed as problem drinkers. In addition, an estimated 3.3 million young people ages 14–17 are problem drinkers.

Between 1966 and 1975 the percent of high school students who said they had been drunk increased from 19 percent to 45 percent.

A high percentage of child-abusing parents have drinking problems. Alcohol-related deaths may run as high as 200,000 per year. In two years' time there are as many alcoholic-related deaths as there were in the entire Vietnam War!

Half of all traffic fatalities and one-third of all traffic injuries are alcohol-related. Whereas a person has the legal right to drink, he does not have the right to endanger the lives of others on the highway by his drinking.

A relatively high correlation exists between alcohol consumption and robbery, rape, assault, homicide; and more than one-third of suicides involve alcohol.

Fetal alcohol syndrome is the third greatest cause of birth defects.

Alcohol is one cause of cancer.

Evidence exists that social drinking impairs one's social and intellectual capacities. Rather than getting sharper, people who drink get duller.

Alcohol abuse and alcoholism cost the United States about \$50 billion in 1975. That figure has risen considerably since then. Taxpayers pay \$11 to offset each \$1 paid in liquor revenue.

Public advocacy of "responsible drinking" can easily be taken as permission to freely use alcoholic beverages with catastrophic results to the young.

Young people often do not have the maturity to know the inherent dangers of alcohol consumption and may take the advocacy of drinking as permission to freely use alcohol resulting in misuse, addiction, and drunkenness.

"And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. (Mark 9:42)

A good question for all adults to consider is, "How can we consistently condemn the recreational use of drugs among the young like marijuana while maintaining the right to drink what produces the same effect?"

Paul affirmed that even Christian liberties must not become a means to hurt a brother or sister in Christ.

It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. (Romans 14:21)

How would the Christian respond to the alcoholic culture in which we live?

It must be borne in mind that the drink question is far more complex and acute in modern than in Biblical times, and that the conditions of the modern world have given rise to problems which were not within the horizon of New Testament writers. The habit of excessive drinking has spread enormously among the common people, owing largely to the cheapening of alcoholic drinks. The fact that the evil exists today in greater proportions may call for a drastic remedy and a special crusade. But rather than defend total abstinence by a false or forced exegesis, it were better to admit that the principle is not formally laid down in the New Testament, while maintaining that there are broad principles enunciated, which in view of modern conditions should lead to voluntary abstinence from all intoxicants. Such principles may be found, e. g. in our Lord's teaching in Matthew 16:24; Mark 9:42, and in the great Pauline passages--Romans 14:13-21; 1 Corinthians 8:8-13. (ISBE)

Conclusions: I've never been drunk but once in my life. When I was about five years old I, along with a friend of mine were exploring in the back yard and discovered some gypsum burrs. I cut them open and got the juice on my hands and apparently into my system. A few hours later I was wild. I never knew

what hit me; but my parents tell me that I was quite out of it. I don't remember a thing!

I hope to never be drunk again from any source. I want to make sure that I do not lose control of my thoughts and consequently do something that I would regret for life. Consequently I am committed to never using any substance in any amount that would put me at risk of losing personal control over my actions.

I want to always live by the principle of love. For me, that means that I would carefully avoid any practice that might hurt others, that might lead them to do something that would hurt themselves. I urge you to do the same.