

Should a Christian Drink Alcohol? (Part 1)

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[0:00] Well, we're going to be looking at an interesting subject tonight, and I will not tell you whose question this was because of the natural insinuation.

Let that soak in just a little bit. Has that soaked in yet? No, actually, I don't remember who asked this question. I guess I've said that with everyone because nobody signed their name.

But, you know, if you're going to ask a question about whether it's all right to drink alcohol, maybe you don't want your name attached to the question. Now you've got it. All right.

Okay. All right. That's what I meant by the natural insinuation. All right. Now, we're going to be talking about or answering the question, should a Christian drink alcohol?

And, you know, maybe we should have sung tonight 100 bottles of beer on the wall as an introduction. We'll get all the frivolity out of the way and get down to the serious subject because, quite frankly, alcohol and alcoholism is a serious subject in our culture.

[1:23] Whichever side of the issue you fall on, that is, in regard to whether or not the Bible, you know, gives Christians permission to drink alcoholic beverages, whichever side you fall on, I think we could begin by saying that we all admit that alcoholism is a scourge upon our society.

And if you have ever traveled abroad, and I have a few different countries, in fact, both countries that I have visited, Ukraine and China, both of them, the male part of the population primarily has been devastated by alcohol.

And we're seeing that in our culture and have for a number of years. And that's not new because the Bible speaks a great deal about alcoholism.

Not so much about the drinking of an alcoholic or fermented beverage, as we're going to discover. The Bible doesn't tell us, you know, a lot about that.

But about the scourge of alcoholism and the prohibition against drunkenness and the addiction to alcohol, the Bible gives plenty of stern warnings as well as commandments or prohibitions against.

[2:49] Now, I'm going to start with three categories of views. And you don't have to fill in the blank here, I don't believe, because I think I gave them to you.

Maybe I do have some blanks to fill in there, I don't know. The first one is the prohibitionist view.

And I know that prohibitionist, the word prohibition brings up all kinds of images, you know, from the Untouchables series years ago on TV.

Anyway, but the prohibitionist view quite clearly is that drinking, the drinking of any alcoholic beverages is biblically wrong. That would be that view, a very strict view.

And those who hold that view, and I happen to be one of them, might as well let that cat out of the bag right now, take some of the passages we're going to be looking at as clear, I think, prohibitions against Christians or God's people being involved in, with alcoholic beverages at all.

That's the prohibitionist view. The second one is abstentionist view. And I've got a little star by that too because I agree with that as well.

[4:02] If there's prohibition against it for a number of reasons, then I think we ought to abstain from alcohol. But the view is basically for both moral and practical reasons, Christians should abstain from alcoholic beverages.

That's just a simple definition of the abstentionist view. So not so much a clear, explicit biblical command, according to this view, but for reasons of moral and practical reasons, some of those we're going to look at tonight, then Christians should abstain from it.

The third view is the moderationist view. And there are a number of Christians that hold this view even among Baptists. And it is a tremendous struggle, I think, among young people, young Christians.

I've had a few conversations with some young believers. I mean from teenage, not just teenagers, but up into the young adult, young couples.

And moderationist view, of course, is Christians are free. And we would agree with that. They're free. We're free. But free to consume alcoholic beverages provided it does not lead to drunkenness. [5:22] So there's the word moderation. So that would be the third view. I don't really think that any view beyond that, certainly a view that would include even getting drunk as being okay, that's certainly not a Christian view.

So these are basically the three Christian views. All right. So, first of all, then, based upon those views, and I put a star by the first two, I lean more toward the prohibitionist view, though I would admit to you that the particular passages that I would reference are not as explicit as I wish they would be.

And don't you just have that kind of struggle with that from time to time about Scripture? I mean, there are certain issues, you know, that you just know are wrong, and you're just looking through the Bible, and you want to find, you know, thou shalt not this and thus and such.

And you wish it would just spell that out so that the Bible would agree with your view. You know what I mean? And I find myself doing that a lot.

And on this particular issue, I think the Bible says a sufficient amount of things about it that I think I've come to a pretty good conclusion.

[6:48] Other issues, of course, the Bible may never even speak to, and we have difficulty sometimes trying to glean from God's Word the spirit of the law or some of the implications.

We're going to begin with a question of definition, and I've given you quite a number of words. I think a near exhaustive list, although I'm going to give you one other word you might add.

That is words that appear in Scripture, that are translated either wine or drink or new wine or strong drink and just kind of give you a broad sweep of the terminology that we have in Scripture because we can learn something from the terminology and how the words are used in their context, and we can learn a great deal from that.

In fact, I'm convinced that we could just stay right here and just analyze where the words appear in Scripture and look at the passages that are around the context, and I think we'd come to a pretty good conclusion about things just based on that.

But let me give you the words. The most common word in the Old Testament is yain, and I have that there for you. It is really the equivalent of the Greek general word for wine, which is oinos, and I've given you that one there at the head of the list in the New Testament.

[8:17] So at the head of the list in the Old Testament, yain, wine, or fruit of the vine, and then in the New Testament, it's oinos, which again is almost always, in fact, I guess always translated wine.

Some secondary words that appear, oh, by the way, before I skip over this, under yain, and I think I may have included this in your notes, the word referred is a general word, and so it refers in Scripture to both fermented wine as well as on occasion unfermented juice, or what we would call today grape juice, not in those days what they would go down to the store and buy, but something that would be produced from the immediate squeezing and crushing of grapes and the juice that's provided by that, just a grape juice, and so it's used in that sense as well.

Just to reference a few where they appear in Scripture, Genesis 9.21, and I have that written there for you. Let me read it to you.

Then he drank of the wine. This is, by the way, a reference to Noah, and you know that story. Noah drank of the wine, that's yain, and was drunk.

So that's a clear reference that the yain there is fermented because he got drunk, and so drunk that he became uncovered in his tent.

[9:54] So he just kind of lost his mind. But then in the sense of an unfermented juice in Proverbs 3.10, well, I have several references there for you, but let me read one of them.

Proverbs 3.10 says, So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine. That's the word yain. All right, so the word yain is just a general term for the fruit of the vine. I'll admit to you, more often than not, it refers to a fermented substance. Just how fermented, there's no way to tell. Sometimes you can tell from the context.

And we'll get into, you know, what the wines were of the day a little bit later. But sometimes it refers to an unfermented juice, sometimes a fermented juice.

Then you have tirosh, is another one which means fresh or new wine. And I'll read that passage to you. Hosea, and you'll find out real quick just whether or not it was a fermented, referring to a fermented beverage.

[11:06] In Hosea 4.11, well, in fact, the latter part of verse 10, and because they have ceased obeying the Lord, harlotry, we know what that is, wine, that's yain, and new wine, that's tirosh, enslave the heart.

So is it reference to a fermented beverage? I think so. If it's going to enslave the heart. Now, can we draw, I mean, right at this point, can we draw from some of these references some clear command against drinking it at all?

I'd like to, but not necessarily. So although it's becoming very clear as you analyze the words as they appear in Scripture, whether you're talking about the general word wine or tirosh, new wine, the effects of it, very negative.

Sure, you might argue the case that the people who were drinking it were drinking too much of it, and, you know, and, you know, myself, I'm not talking about me, but someone who would argue, but I drink just a little bit, you know, a little bit of a meal or something like that, I can never get drunk on that.

All right. But it seems clear from Scripture already that wine, new wine, is presented almost always in a negative sense.

[12:32] Another word is shekar, and that's almost always translated strong drink in the Bible, or strong wine. Sometimes in some translations it will be translated that way.

In Proverbs 20 and verse 1, and this is a very good reference, wine is a mocker, the Bible says. Now, wine, there's yayan. That's that general word for wine. Wine is a mocker. Strong drink is a brawler.

A brawler. You've got to like the translation. And whoever is led astray by it is not wise. All right. Now, strong drink in the text there is this word shekar in Hebrew.

And wherever it appears, it is always presented in a negative light, in a condemning context. It's universally condemned.

[13:36] Strong drink is throughout the Bible. The other word in Hebrew that you might jot down if you want to is mamsawk. Mamsawk.

M-A-M-S-A-W-K is how you would spell it if you were pronouncing it in the English. And that is, believe it or not, mixed drink. We have those today, don't we?

All right. mixed drink. Mixed drink. Or, sometimes translated, mixed wine. That is, it's translated in other Hebrew literature.

The word only appears one time in the Bible. And it's in Proverbs 23. And verse 30. You can jot that down. We'll come back to this text a little bit later because it's, I think, a key text in our discovery about alcohol and Christians.

Did you see that reference again? Proverbs 23, starting with verse 30, but it takes in several verses there. But the word itself appears in verse 30. Those who linger long at the wine, that's Yahya, those who go in search of mixed wine.

[14:52] That's how it appears in the New King James. Sometimes mixed drink in other translations. And that's Momsok. And we'll get back to that text, but it certainly presents it in a very negative sense.

All right. Now, in the New Testament, we have Oinos. I've already mentioned that. It represents, again, the generic word. It's the Greek equivalent of Yahya in the Hebrew. And it's a generic word for the fruit of the vine.

And it does not carry with it, just the word itself does not carry with it any explicit reference to fermentation, though sometimes we get that idea from it.

John 2, 1 through 11, you might jot that text down under there because it is, that passage, by the way, if you know the Gospel of John, chapter 2, is where Jesus performed His first miracle. And it was at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. And He changed the water into wine. Changed it into Oinos. In fact, He made a lot of wine that day.

[16:04] By most measurements or interpretations of the measurements of the day, at least He made turned 120 gallons of water into wine.

Now, we could argue it was a very large marriage celebration as they were in that culture. So there might have been a lot of people there, but I don't know that they needed that much wine.

I think there's a lesson there, but a lesson that goes beyond just the making of the wine. And a lot of people point to that passage and say, they'll reference the particular verse in there that says, when men have well drunk.

That's the King James Version. And so there are people that say, see right there, it says that they got drunk. No, it just means that their thirst was satisfied.

They were well drunk. And so, it's not a text. Jesus was not in the liquor business, okay, there.

[17 : 07] I don't think we can draw that from that text at all. Besides that, the word wine, oinos, generic term, and though we would have to admit, because of the times and the technology, all wines, to some extent or another, were fermented.

They just all were. There's no way to get around that reality. Unless it is new wine that has just come right out of the grape. Now, they didn't have fresh grapes all year round, all right?

So they would store the grape juice. They would do some other things with it too, and we'll get to that here in a minute. But let's just go ahead and admit it right now that all wines that were drunk were to some extent or another fermented.

All right. All right. Now, let me add another word here, then we'll move on. Glucos. Glucos is the other word in the New Testament, and it's translated new wine.

We get our word glucose from this word, by the way. Not sure how the, you know, the connection there, but I don't think glucose is made out of wine, is it?

[18 : 28] Or out of grape? So it's just out of sugar, so I guess somehow, huh? Wine is loaded with sugar. Yeah. Yeah, I guess there's the connection somehow. But anyway, glucose is new wine in Acts chapter 2.

Let's see if I've got that reference here. I just lost that. Well, I don't need to turn to it. You know the story.

It's Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has come upon the disciples, and there's the miracle of the languages, I prefer to call it that, where they're all speaking in, quote, tongues, but they're speaking in languages that they did not know, and then all those from other parts of the country, different dialects and languages, they all understood the gospel in their own language.

The miracle that took place, and some who are standing by said that they were just drunk. Drunk with new wine. Now, new wine, the glucose, is a reference to wine that's fresh, has not gone through a lengthy process of fermentation, and yet it was still fermented, and you could get intoxicated by it, and that's why they claim the disciples are just, you know, of course, Peter's famous answer, oh, that can't be because early in the morning we wouldn't get drunk in the morning.

Will it? It's not the right time to be drinking. We'll not get into that. I think that one just went right down there. Hannah used the same argument.

[20 : 10] Huh? Hannah used the same argument. That's right, she did. All right, now let's move on to a question of fermentation. This is key, and the question is, what was the alcohol content of wine in New Testament times?

You need to ask that question. I've already said, and most scholars, all scholars I've read agree, that all wines in this day were fermented to some extent or another.

even the new wine had a fermentation, and if you drank enough of it, you could get drunk. You'd probably get sick first, but you could get drunk.

The wines of New Testament times were likely diluted with water. Nearly every source that I referenced agreed with this, and some of the sources went way back to Greek culture prior to New Testament times and through New Testament times, and there seems to be an agreement that the wines that were drunk just on a regular basis with meals and when you were thirsty and at different occasions were diluted with water.

A survey of writings from Homer, you could write Homer down there, Pliny, and other classical Greek documents, reveals that wine, oinos, in ancient times, typically diluted with water anywhere from 20 parts water to one part wine.

[21 : 45] That would be the most diluted that you might read about in those times. Anywhere from 20 to 1 to a ratio of 3 to 2.

And the average, based upon all of the writings that scholars have gleaned from, the average was 3 to 4 parts water to 1 part wine.

That was the dilution of it. Was it still fermented? Still was. But you'd have to drink a whole lot of it. In fact, for an example, two martinis.

I've never had a martini in my life. And I'm not going to have a testimony time here tonight either. But two martinis today would equal 22 glasses of wine based upon the 3 to 4 parts water, one part wine.

So it was fermented but not very intoxicating. And they drank it because they had to out of necessity.

[22:57] And although they could drink the water of the days and they did. In fact, we'll reference a little bit here if we have time. Timothy's problem, you know, and Paul's recommendation that he drank a little wine for stomach's sake.

Stop drinking the water. It's killing you. But they did drink water obviously and they did mix the water with the wine. Sometimes they boiled the wine to help in the preserving of it.

I think it was MacArthur that referenced some sources that when the grape harvest and the production of wine they would also boil it down or did something to make, turn it into some kind of a paste.

And then later throughout the year they could add water to it and make the drink. It would be kind of like Kool-Aid. You know, we'd have our little package of wine paste and we'd dump it in the glass and pour it.

Well, yeah, wouldn't that be something? Yeah, wine, what did you say? Made from concentrated grape cheese. All right.

[24:13] I did add there that according to 2 Maccabees, and of course that's one of the apocryphal books, so it's not one of the inspired books in the Bible, and yet we have learned a lot of historical fact from the time period from the Maccabees.

And 2 Maccabees 15:39 mentioned that the Passover wine, wine used at Passover, was 3 to 1. That was the ratio. So we know at least that about the wine.

A question of convention, that is, in this sense, what was the conventional wisdom of the day? The culture. Well, drinking wine unmixed was looked upon as a Scythian, that's the technical word of the day, or a barbarian custom.

So if you drank wine unmixed, you were a barbarian. That was the conventional wisdom of the day, the cultural norm of the day. Robert Stein wrote a great article.

In fact, I'd recommend it. I think I put the reference there at the end of your notes. If you can get a hold of this article, Christianity Today, it was written some time back, but he said this, quote, If the drinking of unmixed wine or even wine mixed in a ratio of 1 to 1 with water was frowned upon in ancient times, certainly the drinking of distilled spirits in which the alcoholic content is frequently 3 to 10 times greater would be frowned upon a great deal more.

[25:41] So, just trying to compare the conventional wisdom and norms of the day, compare that to the kind of wines and alcohol that is consumed today.

Because, see, the question about whether a Christian should drink alcohol is based upon the kinds of alcohols we have today, which I am convinced are much greater in alcoholic content than they ever were in Bible times.

Not that they didn't have the straight unmixed wines, they did. But those who drank it were drunkards and barbarians and so forth.

Athanaeus, I've got a little quote here from Athanaeus, 2nd century AD. He was a pagan, and he said, in daily intercourse, to those who drink wine moderately, it gives good cheer.

Well, sure. But if you overstep the bounds, it brings violence. Mix it half and half and you get madness. Unmixed, bodily collapse. Now, if a pagan of the day says that, then what should that say to us from a Christian perspective?

[26:58] I don't need to answer that question. Then there's the question of moderation. What is wrong with drinking a little wine in moderation? Moderation. That's the question or the argument some would make.

Well, my first thought is there is no standard definition of moderation, is there? What is moderation anyway? I mean, how much is it?

You know, you hear that all the time, and it's one of those arguments, and say, well, you know, I think it's all right in moderation. And, well, sure. Yeah, just what does that mean? And how much is moderation for you?

Is it the same for me? And how about around the table there, you've got a son or daughter, and they see mom and dad drinking a little wine with a meal, and mom and dad are teaching them, we drink a little bit, it's just in moderation.

And they don't have any problem with it, don't suffer any ill effects from it. And then they have a son or a daughter whose physiology might be a little different, and the standard of moderation for mom and dad might be quite different than the standard of moderation physiologically for the son or daughter.

[28:12] Just how much is moderation? That would be the first question. Secondly, alcohol, and these are just questions of moderation, alcohol kills brain cells and delays thinking and reaction time.

And I'll give you this quote. In biblical times, the average person did not strap himself and his children into large metal boxes weighing one to two tons and propel themselves inside those boxes at speeds regularly beyond 100 feet per second within a few feet of other people who are doing the same thing.

I don't think they had to deal with super highways back in Bible times, and so they may have drank a little new wine, and maybe it made them just a little bit dulled in their senses, but because there was no other thing to drink, but they didn't hop in the car with the kids and head down the road at 70 miles an hour.

So we have to think about some of these things. It's alright moderation, but it does dull the senses, even if you drink moderately. As a Christian, we ought to ask, why would I want to be a part of something that has caused so much pain and heartache for so many people, and I'm speaking in reference to the effects when you put drinking any kind of alcoholic beverage with driving. Drinking in moderation greatly increases the potential to turn to alcohol during times of stress, depression, or discouragement.

[29:50] Think about that. if you've opened the gate, opened the door, so to speak, to drinking some alcoholic beverages just during meal or maybe in moderation, you know, just a glass or maybe a beer here, whatever, just consider that once you open that door, then there are going to be some times in your life, because stress, discourage, some major thing happens in your life, you've already opened the door to a substance that will help you escape, so-called, help you escape your problem that you're facing, and so moderation, I just don't think is a good idea in that sense.

Drinking in moderation opens the door to drunkenness and addiction, both of which are universally condemned in the Bible, and a couple of them, Proverbs chapter 20 and verse 1, well I already read it, wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray is not wise, and then in Proverbs 23, and I read just a part of it, but let me start with verse 29, who is woe, who has sorrow, who has contentions, who has complaints, who has wounds without cause, who has redness of eyes, you know where it's leading, I'll tell you, here's the answer, those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine, do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, that's a reference to fermentation, when it swirls around smoothly, at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper, your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things, yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of a sea, you understand what that means?

Or like one who lies at the top of a mast, up high, saying, they have struck me, but I was not hurt, I don't know what happened to me, and then, I like, I mean, this last line is very poignant, when shall I awake that I may seek another drink?

drink. And so, it's just very clear, isn't it, that certainly, the bottom line is, the Bible certainly condemns drunkenness and addiction, certainly, warns against addiction, and condemns drunkenness, and the Bible says, when the drink, the wine, is reaching a terrible fermentation, don't even look at it, and, remember, this axiom, alright, a person who never takes a single drink of alcohol will never violate the scriptural prohibition of drunkenness and addiction to alcohol, so if you never take a drink, then you never have to worry about breaking the condemnation in scripture, someone has said, because alcoholism is a sin and not a disease, and it is, by the way, since it's a sin and not a disease, you won't catch the sin of drunkenness if you never drink alcohol to begin with, it just makes good sense, doesn't it, and I have quite a bit more here, and we don't have time to cover it tonight,

I may give you the rest of it the week when I get back, alright?