

CHRISTIANS AND ALCOHOL

A Statement of Position

This topic can be a confusing one for Christians. But that's nothing new. It was a confusing issue in the life of Jesus too.

The Bible says, "For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners.'" (Luke 7:33,34)

First century Christians rejected John because he was so strange. He would not eat what normal people ate nor drink what normal people drank. They rejected Jesus because He behaved like everyone else, eating what they ate and drinking alcohol like everyone else in His day. So what's a Christian to do? Abstain? Indulge? Does the Bible offer any direction?

Let me say first of all, there can be no doubt that the use of alcoholic wine and other alcoholic drinks was common in both the Old and New Testament. The prophet Eli accused faithful Hannah of being drunk when she was praying fervently for a child before the birth of Samuel. Jesus changed water into alcoholic wine at the wedding feast. Do you remember what the headwaiter of the banquet said? "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." (John 2:10) The practice in Jesus' day is based on the effect fermented wine would have on the guests' abilities to distinguish "good" wine from "just average" wine after a drink or two!

There are many examples of people suffering from the effects of overdrinking throughout the Bible, and much said against drunkenness. Jesus also used the fermentation process to describe how destructive it would be to put His "new" teaching into Old Testament thinking. Wineskins must be new for new wine, so that when the fermentation takes place, it can expand and then shrink like new leather. Old, hardened leather would break, and the wine would be lost when it fermented. (Mark 2:22) On Pentecost, the men who spoke in "tongues" were accused of being drunk on wine. (Acts 2:13) Obviously the people had seen a few "drunks" in their life.

It is true the Bible speaks strongly against the abuse of alcohol. Intoxication is condemned in many places. (Proverbs 20:1) It is mentioned as one of the most dangerous sins because it can take control of a person's life. Certain sins that have the ability to become a destructive lifestyle receive special warning. Abuse of alcohol is listed among those "deadly sins." (1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:19-21) The foolishness of intoxication is described in detail in Proverbs 23:20,29-35. Drunkenness is opposed to the very spirit of God. (Ephesians 5:15-18) Faithful Christians and faithful churches will oppose any use of alcohol that leads to abuse. At the same time, faithful Christians and faithful churches must be careful not to make laws where God has not. To oppose

the use of alcohol because it has potential to be destructive would be equivalent to opposing prescription medications, sex, money, or even food; all God-given gifts that can be used in immoral ways.

The Bible actually speaks of alcohol in positive ways as a gift from God. In Psalm 104:14,15 it is listed among blessings given by God like grass for cattle and food for man. Its purpose is to "gladden the heart of man." Psalm 23 is one of the most loved chapters in the entire Bible. In that chapter David compares the overflowing blessing of God to a goblet of wine that is filled to overflowing, a good thing. In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul told Timothy to not only drink water but to add wine to his diet in order to aid in the digestion and appreciation of his food. To this very day it is the custom of many to serve a glass of wine with special meals to cleanse the pallet and sharpen the taste buds. Isaiah 1:22 compares the corruption of people with wine that has been diluted with water. No one would serve their guest wine that has been corrupted in such a way, just as it would be inappropriate be less than authentic as a child of God.

So what do these passages teach us when it comes to the practical application of the Biblical standard for use and abuse of alcohol?

1. Alcohol is not evil, but can be abused and becomes the cause of evil behavior.
2. We should not criticize or otherwise question the sincerity of Christians who use alcohol in moderation.
3. We should not criticize or otherwise question the sincerity of Christians who refuse to drink alcohol even in moderation.
4. As Christians we must obey the law. (Romans 13:1) That means we abide by the age policy set by our state for the sell, purchase and consumption of alcohol. Some states forbid the sale of alcohol on Sunday. Most states have laws against open containers in automobiles. There are legal limits established for drinking and driving, but the best rule is to have a designated driver who completely abstains for the safety of all. Most states have procedures to obtain permits for public consumption of alcohol that must not be violated.
5. We should refrain from exercising our freedom to drink legally if our example would cause another person to sin against their own conscience or drink even though they have a history of alcoholism and abuse. (cf. 1 Corinthians #6:12, #8:9; #10:23,24)
6. If we are responsible for a party or a gathering where alcohol is served, we should make sure to the best of our ability that it is not abused or the law violated.

Most important of all, we should guard our witness as children of God. We need to make sure that we never assume a self-righteous spirit of judgment towards weak Christians or non-Christians who need help to overcome the problem of alcohol abuse. We should be careful never to allow the exercise of our freedoms to become license for sinful abuse of alcohol or any other potentially harmful habits. Right or wrong, people will often judge our faith and our Savior by the behavior of those who call themselves Christian.