

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES
DRINKING AND DRUGS
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The use of alcohol and drugs is a widespread problem in the world today. It is estimated that about seventy percent of Americans drink some mixture of alcohol, and nearly ten million are alcoholics. Four to five million Americans use cocaine, and a '91 survey of teenagers, ages 13-18, revealed that 26 percent used marijuana on a regular basis.

Though the Bible does not condemn, by name, such things as marijuana, heroine, cocaine, acid, or other such drugs, it does condemn them in principle. When drunkenness is condemned in the Scriptures that principle is understood to extend to all mind-altering, addictive drugs.

Very few, if any, challenge the idea that drunkenness is condemned in the Bible (Lk. 21:34; Rom. 13:13; 1Cor. 6:10; Gal. 5:21; 1Pet. 4:3) But, why is drunkenness wrong?

1. It impairs judgment. Isa. 28:7 "...the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment." Jeffcoat, author of The Bible and Social Drinking says "every increase of alcohol in the blood progressively suppresses the operation of those areas of the brain on which persons depend for clear insights and rational decisions" p.90 He further states "it is that area of the brain where clear insights and rational decisions originate which is first affected by alcohol, long before the more obvious signs of drunkenness, such as slurred speech and loss of balance, occur" P. 86-92.

The Bible teaches that Judgment is a characteristic to be cultivated, not destroyed or compromised. Phil. 1:9 "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." i.e. perception, discernment--Vine p. 622.

2. It steals away the drinker's self control. The desire for alcohol increases with indulgence. i.e. the more you drink, the more you desire to drink. 2Pet. 1:5-6 "add...temperance..." i.e. self-control. The Christian is forbidden from doing anything that compromises his self control. The decision to take the first drink or experiment with drugs indicates a weakness in self-control to start with.

3. After loss of self-control the drinker is defenseless against other sins. Prov. 25:28 "like a city whose walls are broken down

is a man who lacks self-control" NIV

How many fights, brawls, acts of fornication, adultery, child abuse, and even murder have been committed by people under the influence of alcohol or drugs who other wise would have never dreamed of such things.

4. Prolonged indulgence (in some cases only brief indulgence) leads to addiction.

No one starts drinking with the ambition of becoming an alcoholic, yet 200,000 people per year become just that. According to the National Council on Alcoholism, there are nearly ten million alcoholics in U. S. today. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcholism estimates that 19 percent of adolescents or 3.3 million young people ages 14-17 are problem drinkers.

Rom. 6:12 "let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

5. Alcohol and drugs have led countless millions to physical and spiritual ruin. Prov. 23:29 Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixed wine."

Gal. 5:21 those who participate in drunkenness "shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

WHAT ABOUT SOCIAL DRINKING?

On the continuum between drunkards and alcoholics on the one end and teetotal abstainers on the other end, there exists in the middle a large number of people who only drink occasionally. The people consider themselves "social drinkers". They argue that the abuse of alcohol is wrong, not the mere use of it for social purposes. To them so long as a person drinks without getting drunk, he/she has committed no wrong.

Alcohol is the only drug with which people use this kind of reasoning. Seldom will you hear someone agrue "its ok to smoke marijuna, or use cocaine, acid, or heroin, so long as you don't use too much and get high."

This sounds ridiculous to most of us. Yet the statement "it is all right to drink alcoholic beverages as long as you don't get drunk" is widely accepted.

The idea of drinking "socially" without drunkenness is at

variance with the scriptures. Eph. 5:18 "Be not drunk with wine." "Drunk" translates the greek word (methusko) which means "to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process of the state expressed in methuo (drunkenness) to become intoxicated" Vine p. 343

It is important to note that drunkenness is a "process" and not merely a "state". This is an important point, since most social drinkers argue that one is not drunk until he/she reaches a stage of excessive drunkenness.

Even English dictionaries recognize the idea that drunkenness involves a whole range of progressive stages: American Heritage Dictionary p.673 Intoxicate---"1. To induce, esp. by the effect of ingested alcohol, any of a series of progressively deteriorating states, ranging from exhilaration to stupefaction."

The effects of alcohol begin when consumption begins, rather than slipping up on the drinker all at once after an extended period of drinking.

The argument that if the above is true, then one would be drunk after only one swallow of beer, misses the point. The important lesson in the argument for Christians is this: since drunkenness involves a process, the child of God should avoid that which sets the process into motion.

Negative Considerations

The teaching regarding Elder and Deacon: 1Tim.3:3 and 3:8

"not given to wine" lit. to not tarry at wine, not sitting at wine. The idea is not to be long beside wine. 1Tim. 3:3

"not given to much wine" lit. do not turn your attention to or your mind to wine. You will not give heed to wine or bring it near you. 1Tim.3:8

"not given to much wine" Tit. 2:3 means to not be enslaved to wine. The idea is to reduce to bondage.

1. It is difficult to understand how the word "much" in this setting means to drink less than excess, but more than none when the actual word drink is not even mentioned.

2. The type of reasoning used on "given" and "much" would be interesting to apply to 1Tim.3:8 and Tit. 1:7 when it speaks of "not greedy of filthy lucre" and "not given to filthy lucre".

Would we argue that the deacon in 1Tim.3:8 can seek filthy lucre as long as he is not greedy after it. But that Elder in Tit. 1:7 is forbidden of all filthy lucre? Do these phrases permit different shades of sinful desire with a little for one and none for the other?

3. It is well to remember that the forbidding of much is not a mute approval of some.

Eccl. 7:17 "be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?"

1Pet. 4:4 Wherein they think it strange that ye run not to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" Can we run to some excess so long as it is not the same excess?

The fact that I am told not to murder does not mean that I can inflict all kinds of physical harm on a person so long as I don't take his life.

Temperance in the use of harmful things is to abatain from them. Alcohol for mere social and psychological reasons is harmful. The fact we are told to abstain from much wine does not imply one should partake of a little wine for pleasure. The lack of an absolute prohibition in this setting does not mean some drinking of wine was encouraged or permitted for purposes of pleasure. The fact that aged women should not be enslaved to wine was no permission slip to drink moderately. The fact that deacons should not be given to much wine is not permission to drink a certain amount of alcohol. Such reasoning would turn a prohipition against addiction into an apporval of some drinking.

We might better serve both of these passages if we lay aside all assumed contrasts and simply recognize that Paul is teaching that elders should not be long in the presence of wine and for deacons to not give their attention to wine.

The problem appears to be in taking terms that do not expressly forbid, in the sense we expect the expression should be done, and not permittrng other passages to help us make sound conclusions.

We should be cautions in asking the bible to express something in a way we think it should have been expressed.

Since we all know that alcohol abuses, it seems rather foolish for us to talk of the virtue of not abusing it.

Rom.14:21

Does this passage teach the moderate use of alcohol? Is drinking wine in the realm of liberty?

Nothing is here said that indicates that drinking alcoholic wine is in the realm of liberty. The point Paul is making in this

verse can be made whether the wine is fermented or unfermented.
The point is I will not ingest anything (eat or drink) that
offends my brother.