

Should Christian's Drink Alcohol? - Part 1

by Keith Malcomson

The sermon addresses the complex issue of alcohol consumption among Christians, emphasizing biblical teachings and health risks associated with drinking.

Scripture: Leviticus 19:17, Proverbs 20:1, Proverbs 27:5, 1 Corinthians 5:11, 1 Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:21, Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 5:11, James 5:19

Topics: "Alcohol Abuse", "Christian Living"

Description

Keith Malcomson addresses the controversial topic of alcohol consumption among Christians, highlighting the shift in attitudes towards social drinking within the church. He emphasizes the dangers of drunkenness, the biblical warnings against alcohol abuse, and the consequences of failing to address this issue within the Christian community. Malcomson delves into the biblical perspectives on wine, the facts about alcohol, the sin of drunkenness, the implications for Christian drunkards, and the importance of restoring fallen brothers who struggle with alcoholism.

Transcript

This subject has become one of the hottest debated subjects in recent decades amongst professing born-again believers. Prior to this time though, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Bible-believing Christian's and Spirit-filled believers would not even consider this a subject for discussion. It went without saying that a true Christian would politely steer clear of alcohol and most certainly any environment of drunkenness unless it was for the purpose of militant and compassionate evangelism. But this has all changed.

The social drinking of alcohol and strong drinks has been promoted by key preachers, teachers and leaders and as a result has swept across the church overnight. What was anathema yesterday is strongly encouraged today. Leaders may well say that they believe in moderation - drinking alcohol in small amounts so as not to get drunk - but the sad case is that what I have seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears in a number of different countries is that this has led to tipsiness, drunkenness and loose living amongst so called born-again believers.

What may have been an issue that could be argued over or debated has now become a problem. I hear of incident after incident of so-called born-again Spirit-filled believers saying that obedience to the commands of Christ are legalism; a life of prayer, discipline, modesty and moderation is legalism; any restriction to their liberty to do whatsoever they please is legalism. Fasting, prayer, obedience, sacrifice, tears, repentance, the faithful reading of the Bible and even correct relationships and conduct between

men and women is all cast aside as being of the order of the Old Testament!

But the Bible says that such people are sensual - they do not have the real Spirit of God. They are not rightly dividing the Word of truth. They are in very real danger of their eternal soul.

There are a great number of believers who have not been in the habit of drinking any alcohol or of encouraging its use but during the recent decades as they have been faced with a constant barrage of half-quotes and misapplied texts from the Bible, have become unsure as to their own convictions and ability to say that a Christian cannot drink alcohol. The seemingly convincing arguments of pro-drinkers have persuaded a great many. Such believers want to be honest and to interpret the Bible correctly but have felt that there is too much truth in what pro-drinkers say. Yet other scriptures make them to hold back from embracing such a thing as right before God.

This article will primarily help such people but will also be a solid challenge to those who are fully persuaded that as a Christian the Bible allows them to socially drink alcohol.

My heart also goes out to a whole generation who through lack of knowledge in being taught what Scripture reveals and commands are perishing within what is called the church. They have been birthed into a lukewarm environment in which the order of the day is to walk as close to the line as possible or to cast aside all restrictions and to do whatsoever seems right in their own eyes. Such is a very ancient heresy. My heart goes out to these young masses because they perish for lack of knowledge.

This article in the following sections will deal with the whole subject of Alcohol and the Bible and whether Christians are encouraged or discouraged from drinking alcohol by the Word of God.

Wine in the Bible

Facts about Alcohol

Drunkenness

Christian Drunkards

Recovering a Fallen Brother

Leadership and Alcohol

Social Drinking by God's People

A Spirit-Filled Life

Questions & Answers

1. Wine in the Bible

First of all we must realise that when the term "wine" is used in our English version of the Bible it is a broad term including two specific and separate things. Firstly, grape juice which is non-alcoholic and is called wine in the Bible and secondly, alcoholic drink which can intoxicate or make a person drunk, is also called wine in the Bible.

Those who say that the word wine in the Bible always means non-alcoholic grape juice are wrong but so too are those who say that the term wine in the Bible always means an alcoholic drink. In fact 13 different Hebrew and Greek words are used for our English word wine in the Bible. These various Hebrew and Greek words can mean, i) Only a fermented drink, like shekhar, ii) Only an unfermented drink, like tirosh, iii) And those words which can be used for both, like yayin. (A comprehensive word study is beyond this present article but please bear in mind that this article is written in the light of all these facts).

Processing the Grape:

When grape juice is initially squeezed out, it has a high content of sugar and is not naturally alcoholic. It is only under the right conditions that yeast cells which are held on the surface of the grape skin begin to act on the sugar content that the process of fermentation begins which will eventually turn the grape juice into an alcoholic drink. When this action has produced about a 12% alcoholic content it ceases.

As is well known the production of alcoholic wine is a manufacturing business of great skill. It always has been. Good alcoholic wine does not develop of itself; it must be carefully watched, monitored and engineered.

This process of fermentation can fail to begin or can be greatly hindered by too much heat, cold or a number of other conditions. The yeast that ferments the wine is nothing more than a mould or fungus. Not all moulds will produce wine. Some bacteria if allowed to work upon the freshly squeezed grape juice will produce vinegar.

The temperature of wine must be maintained between 65 and 75 degrees in order to produce alcoholic wine. If this procedure is not carried out correctly it can destroy the production of alcoholic wine or stop it in its tracks at a very low level.

With hard work wine producers can produce a 14% alcoholic content in the wine but more normally the end result is 10-12%.

If during the fermentation process the temperature of the wine is kept at 100 degrees F for about one hour it will kill the yeasts that produce alcohol. If this was increased to 140 degrees F it would kill the whole process in ten minutes.

In the ancient world during the Old and New Testament period the production of non-alcoholic wine was widespread across the whole Mediterranean world. It was well known and practised. The use of heat, cold, thickening and filtering ensured this process.

Boiling ensured there was no fermentation as it killed the yeasts but concentrated the sugar content as the water evaporated. Fermentation was also prevented by storing it in a cool atmosphere in earthen, airtight vessels. Such grape fruit juice could be stored for up to two years without fermenting.

Many ancient writers like Virgil, Pliny, Aristotle, Homer and others wrote concerning the production of wine, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic. They were very clear in explaining that non-alcoholic wine was widely used all the year round just as they were clear that there was also the means to produce good alcoholic wine for intoxication.

Why are we looking at these details and what do they have to do with the issue of alcohol in the Bible? These details go to prove that man had to work hard at producing good alcoholic wine. It proves that

non-alcoholic wine was readily available during Bible days and was even a common drink in society. It also shows why the word for wine in the Bible was given to both alcoholic and non-alcoholic wine. These are important points in the biblical discussion.

Those who have been at the forefront of contending that Christians can drink socially have constantly stated that non-alcoholic wine was not widely available in Bible days and that when the Bible uses the term wine it always means fermented grape juice. Of course what we have just stated in this section factually undermines this myth.

2. Facts about Alcohol

It is a very clear fact that the word wine is also widely used in the Bible for an alcoholic drink which when consumed will produce drunkenness which is constantly condemned and warned against.

It is a scientific, legal and medical fact that even the smallest amount of alcohol affects speech, balance and the ability to make clear judgments. The more alcohol that is taken the more this increases until it becomes noticeable by the person and by others. By the time someone realizes that their alcoholic intake is beginning to affect them it already has!

This does not begin with taking a large amount to cause drunkenness but begins with the very first initial intake even if the effect is totally unnoticed by all. Medical science tells us that the effect of alcohol reaches the brain within one minute after intake. It needs no time to digest like food does; it gets VIP treatment and quick access to each member of the body.

When taken, alcohol passes from the stomach into the small intestine, where it is rapidly absorbed into the blood and distributed throughout the body. Because it is distributed so quickly and thoroughly the alcohol can affect the central nervous system even in small concentrations. In low concentrations, alcohol reduces inhibitions. The alcohol is then broken down by the liver and finally eliminated from the body. The liver is capable of breaking down the amount of about one drink per hour. Until the liver has time to break down the alcohol it keeps circulating in the bloodstream, affecting all of the body's organs, including the brain. The alcohol depresses the brain and slows down its ability to control the body and mind. This is why alcohol can be so dangerous. Alcohol acts like a sedative by slowing down muscle coordination, reflexes, movement, and speech.

The best secular advice by the National Council of Alcohol says that "If you do choose to drink, sip each drink slowly, and always consume alcohol with food. Space drinks out to no more than one drink per hour, and consume plenty of water in between drinks. Never drink while pregnant and never drive when intoxicated." Again The British Dietetic Association says "Even a moderate amount of alcohol produces a range of negative short-term effects on the body..."

Even the world realises that alcohol is a very dangerous drug which must be handled with extreme care. Sad to say many so-called Christians deliberately overstep even this basic worldly wisdom.

Within the alcohol is the power and ability to undermine the natural God-given abilities of thought and action.

Social drinkers who binge can get irregular heartbeats from their alcoholic intake. If an individual drinks too much alcohol, his or her breathing or heart rate can reach dangerously low levels or even stop.

The dangers of excessive drinking range from small short term problems to large terminal problems. Dehydration, dulled senses, decreased reaction time, impaired judgement, impaired memory, weight gain, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease, blood conditions, loss of long term memory, heart problems, premature dementia and loss of bladder control are all very real dangers. Half of those diagnosed with cancer in the oesophagus, larynx and mouth are linked to alcohol. Various forms of arthritis can be advanced by alcohol abuse. The list is endless. When consumed in large amounts over a prolonged period of time, alcohol can harm virtually every part of your body.

Most medical advice will strongly suggest that pregnant women steer totally clear of all alcohol during pregnancy. The alcohol travels rapidly through your bloodstream, your placenta and to your baby. The baby can not process the alcohol as fast as you can as its liver is one of the last organs to develop fully and does not mature until the latter half of pregnancy, so it is exposed to greater amounts of alcohol for longer than you are which can seriously affect the baby's development. Alcohol in a foetus has a toxic effect on developing cells and organs, especially in the brain, where it kills cells. Too much alcohol during pregnancy can change the way a baby's face, organs and brain develops. It can also affect the nervous system, which is why learning difficulties and life-long problems with movement and coordination often result. Miscarriage and premature birth are also a very real danger. Children damaged during pregnancy may be born small and remain small for their age. Again the problems are numerous. This drug endangers the life of humanity on all fronts.

One last area that alcohol has a deadly affect upon is the crime rate in our nations. Whilst writing this article I caught a brief news item informing us that half of those arrested for criminal activity in my country, Northern Ireland, were under the influence of alcohol. Statistics in America for alcohol related car crashes are beyond belief. At least 40% of all car crash fatalities are alcohol related. Someone is killed every 45 minutes and injured every two minutes by someone under the influence of alcohol. This is America's leading criminal cause of death each year.

Not only is it dangerous to the body and soul but also to the eternal destiny of the spirit. Alcoholic wine is portrayed time and time again in the Bible to be as dangerous as a serpent's bite which kills. Deut.32:33 "Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps." Pro.23:31-32, "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."

Drinking alcoholic wine is like drinking poison.

Let's look closer at the description of this wine in Proverbs 23. It says "at the last it biteth." In other words it does not initially reveal its danger. At first it may seem fun and innocent but in the end it will bite like a serpent.

This drink has the ability of being the doorway to all sin and of carrying a man where he thought he would never go. In verse 33 it says "Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things." A man who would not normally do this would do it when under the influence of alcohol.

In verses 29-30 we read of other dire consequences for an individual under the influence of this wine. "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."

In the light of all this verse 31 commands "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright." This is not a description of non-alcoholic wine, it is a clear description of alcoholic wine. Here is a command to not even look upon such a drink!

The writer knows that the drink itself is dangerous, not just its abuse. He also knows that this problem is not dealt with by advising moderation in drinking. He places a ban upon the first look which leads to the first drink. The word used here for "look" means to fix your eyes upon it, to gaze at it, to consider or take heed to it. This is not talking about a mere look at it but a real lust and desire for it with the intention of drinking it.

We well know that Jesus taught that if a man looked upon a woman to lust it was equivalent to committing adultery. In this proverb the writer is dealing with the root and the heart of the problem. Don't even look upon such a drink with a desire to drink because the end of such a desire is disastrous for a great many. Such a look at alcoholic wine could be equivalent to the actual act of drunkenness.

It is in the light of all this that the Bible warns in Proverbs 20:1 "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." And again it warns about close association with those who are given over to drinking alcohol or to a gluttonous lifestyle. "Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags." Pro 23:20-21. As a side note those who overeat are put in the same bracket as drunkards!

How can any Christian continue to drink socially in a manner they call moderation when they hear all of these facts?

3. Drunkenness

The first issue to settle in relation to alcohol is the fact that the teaching of scripture is very clear in calling all drunkenness sin. Sadly, in certain groups which call themselves 'Christian,' drunkenness is accepted, tolerated, promoted, enjoyed or seen as a mere weakness.

All such excuses for drunkenness are clearly challenged and condemned by the written Word of God. Men and denominations can argue over such things but God's Word alone has the final say in all such matters. Let's look at what the Bible says about drunkenness.

Drunkenness is mentioned over 70 times in the Bible and as with every other subject it is very clear in stating what is right and wrong.

I Cor.6:9-10, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

Take good note here that Paul teaches the Church at Corinth that a "drunkard...shall not inherit the kingdom of God." He will not enter God's kingdom, he is not saved and he is not on his way to heaven. Paul confirms this again in Galatians ch.5:21, "...murders, drunkenness...and such like...they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." This could not be clearer.

Again note in the above scripture that Paul says "...the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." He then goes on to define this unrighteousness by naming several lifestyles including drunkenness.

Drunkenness is unrighteousness and will send you to hell as quickly as murder, idolatry or adultery.

In verse 11 he goes on to say "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." So those who made up the Corinthian church had amongst them those who before becoming Christians were drunkards, liars, homosexuals, adulterers and a host of every sinful lifestyle.

Paul was clearly saying here that there were believers amongst them who were once drunkards but who had through salvation been washed, sanctified and justified. They were not only forgiven and washed from their past sin but were changed in character and nature in a manner that made them a new creature in Christ Jesus. They no longer got drunk. Praise God.

The Greek word for drunkard means: to be tipsy; to drink well; to drink to the point of intoxication. It was the act of drinking beverages made from barely, grapes or pomegranates which were fermented and so alcoholic. It was a state in which a man took that which affected and dulled his senses and altered his mode of action, speech, composure and ability. To be a drunkard was not a one of incident but a way of life.

Let's be very clear, such actions as drunkenness unless repented of will send a man to hell.

Such sins as drunkenness were set apart as so wicked in the Old Testament, and dangerous to the whole welfare of the community that God ordained that such a person should be stoned to death.

Deut.21:20-21, "And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."

Drunkenness goes hand in hand with rebellion and gluttony. God calls it evil and says that it must be put away from amongst His people. It cannot be tolerated.

The Bible warns us more than 70 times about the sin of drunkenness and gives us 19 clear examples of the abuse of alcoholic wine. Let's look at just a couple of such incidents involving righteous men in the Old Testament who got drunk and the consequences that came from it.

The first recorded incident of drunkenness in the Bible was that of Noah. He was indeed a righteous man who feared God but this one-off incident of drunkenness is indeed sad. Gen 9:20-21, 24-25, "And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan;" This act of drunkenness led to great shame and family conflict.

The second incident of drunkenness was that of Lot. You will remember that he set his tent towards the city of Sodom and Gomorrah and actually raised a family there amidst gross abounding iniquity which eventually polluted and destroyed his whole family even though he himself was righteous. After escaping the judgement of God with his two young daughters he took refuge in a cave. The daughters, thinking that all mankind had been destroyed, produced a plan to conceive a child by their father. In Genesis 19 we are told that they said "...let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him. And they made their father drink wine that night also..." This terrible act of incest was the result of drunkenness. These desperate and immoral girls learned their trade in Sodom. This righteous man was led to immorality twice through

drinking wine. They could only fulfil their scheme if he was drunk. He never would have consented if he had his wits about him.

Many a righteous young man or woman has played games with alcohol and have been burnt by being taken advantage of while under its influence and losing their virginity. Hab.2:15 "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!" This world and even some who profess to be Christians will use alcohol to draw others into sin. Those who avoid all such use of alcohol are saved from many dangers.

4. Christian Drunkards

Paul goes further in speaking of those in the church who are called Christians, who are called by the name of the Lord and so called "brother" yet who on a regular basis begin to get drunk or come under the influence of alcohol. He says,

I Cor.5:11, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat."

Again Paul is very clear. He says that if there is a man in the Church who is considered to be a Christian by others or who calls himself a Christian but yet gets drunk, he is to be dealt with, not ignored. The Church, the Christians who know him or others who come in touch with him are instructed how they are to act towards such a so-called Christian Drunkard.

First of all they are not to keep company with him. That means they are not to intermix with him or allow him to intermix with them. They cannot gather together with him or dwell in unity with him as if nothing is wrong. He must be excluded from fellowshiping with them in meetings or Christian gatherings.

Secondly, they are not even to eat with such a one. So this does not only include church meetings but also social fellowship. In verse 13 we are told "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." A so-called Christian who gets drunk is called a "wicked person." True Christians who love Jesus and love God's Word must not allow such persons to fellowship amongst them in their meetings or in their homes. Our young people must not see such a lifestyle displayed as acceptable.

This is basic Christian teaching concerning the order of the local church and again is very clear. Sadly it is rarely taken seriously in most churches.

Please do take very good note however that Paul makes it clear in verse 10 that he is not speaking "of this world" or people of this world who were outside the Church and outside of Christ because then "must ye needs go out of the world." If Christians were commanded not to meet, intermix or eat with drunkards, fornicators, idolaters and such like it would be impossible to live in secular society at all.

But Paul is only speaking of those who profess to be Christians. In verse 13 he says "them that are without, God judgeth." And again "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without?" So although Paul was distinct in his preaching and teaching that drunkards in the world will go to hell, he makes clear that God will deal with them and judge them, not man or the church.

While we are not to implement judgement upon sinners outside the church Paul does say "do not ye judge them that are within?" Of course the answer is yes. Christians are to implement judgement or church

discipline upon those calling themselves Christians if it becomes evident that they are living in such sin.

It has become increasingly popular to hear Christians say 'leave it to the Holy Spirit to convict them' or 'leave it to their own conscience'; or 'God knows their heart,' but the fact is that we are clearly commanded to be led by the Spirit of God in dealing with them over it. To turn a blind eye and to ignore such actions without taking action is disobedience to the revealed will of God.

Why is this to be done? Again Paul says in II Thess.3:14-15, "...have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." This separating of yourself from him is for the purpose that he may be ashamed of his actions. To be ashamed means to come to a realisation of his sin; to realise the sinfulness of sin; to turn his eyes inward to his own inward state in such a way as to create shame for his actions.

5. Recovering a Fallen Brother

Again in II Thess.3:14-15, "...have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Here is a lovely balance. Yes separate from him but treat him as a brother and look for him to repent, to turn from his sin and to return to Christ.

We have known Christians to become ashamed of such a person who has fallen into drunkenness who have then separated from him in such a manner as to count him an enemy rather than a fallen brother. This is wrong. This shows a lack of compassion, concern, and no consciousness of their own frailty. We must treat such a one as a brother and not an enemy until such time as it becomes clear that he will not take heed to genuine brotherly warnings.

How do you treat him as a brother rather than an enemy? By admonishing him. To admonish means to call attention to; to warn; to put in mind. It carries the sense of carrying this out with gentleness. If you want to act with brotherly love towards such a one you will admonish them. You will point out their sin, you will exhort them to return, you will seek to woo and win them back to Christ.

Eph.5:11, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

No matter what someone's past testimony seems to be as a Christian, if they turn aside to drunkenness and die in such a state they will be eternally lost. Jm.5:19-20, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

A true Christian may stray, stumble and fall but they prove themselves a true brother in Christ by listening and responding to such admonishing and by returning to Christ. A practising drunkard who calls himself a Christian is called by God a "sinner." Unless he turns he is on a pathway of death. Those who think they can get drunk but go to heaven are deceived.

Christians must realise that they must labour to turn so-called Christians as well as sinners from drunkenness and to know that by doing so they will save souls from hell. In Lev.19:17 we are told that if we see our brother sin but do not rebuke him, it shows that we hate him! "Open rebuke is better than secret love." Prov.27:5

It is a real sign of spirituality for a Christian to labour to restore a fallen brother. Gal.6:1: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

It is not sufficient to rebuke a fallen brother we must restore them. That is the goal in view of all godly rebuke. This term "restore" means to repair or mend something and is used of the fixing of rent fishing nets. We must labour to restore a fallen brother to his first estate.

Take good note that we are to do this "in the spirit of meekness", that is in gentleness and humility. Anyone who is going to participate in restoring fallen Christians must have the right heart attitude. This is vital. Pride, arrogance, roughness, mocking and such things will never restore a fallen brother. But more than that, if someone tries to minister to others with such a heart they may well themselves find that they are tempted and fall into sin. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1Cor.10:12

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/keith-malcomson/should-christians-drink-alcohol-part-1/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net