

What the Bible Says About Alcohol

By Jim Davis

Each year in our country there is an astounding loss of life and property that is directly related to alcohol. The social problems associated with the abuse of alcohol are tragic. What does the Bible say on this issue? Is it a sin for a Christian to drink alcohol?

The Christian's highest priority in life should be to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). The greatest commandment is to love God (Matthew 22:37-38). The public expression of these values must come from the heart and manifest in our choices. For the Christian the ultimate authority for making choices comes from God's Word. When we make our choices on the principles of God's Word it honors Him and it is an expression of our love for Him (John 15:10). Here are some principles for making decisions in light of the Bible. I would like to apply them to the Christian and drinking alcohol but they can be applied to any matter of Christian practice.

Drinking Alcohol and the direct commands of Scripture.

There are numerous passages of Scripture that condemn drunkenness as a sin. In Ephesians 5:18, the Apostle Paul commands that we are not to be drunk with wine but filled with the Holy Spirit. We are to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and we are not to be controlled by alcohol or any other substance. We are commanded to be sober or free from any intoxicating influence. In our quest to glorify God our minds should be clear and our senses should be sharp as we apply the principles of God's word to our daily experiences. Romans 13:13 says that we are to "behave properly as in the day not in carousing and drunkenness."

Not only are we not to get drunk but we are also not to associate with a so-called brother if he should be a drunkard (1 Corinthians 5:11). It is clear from these passages and others that the Lord wants for us to stay away from the damaging abuses of alcohol.

Although drunkenness is denounced as sin in the Bible drinking is not. Since the Bible does not teach that drinking alcohol is a sin, it should not be condemned from the pulpit nor erroneously defined as sin. It is not necessary for us to break fellowship with a so-called brother that drinks alcohol. We may fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Europe and other parts of the world that do not view the use of alcohol the same as the abuse of alcohol.

It should be noted that John the Baptist glorified God by fasting and abstaining from drinking alcohol while Jesus glorified His Father and went to parties and drank alcohol (Matthew 11:18-19). Jesus drank wine with His disciples at the Passover (Luke 22:15-18) and He even turned the water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-11). If we try to lead others to believe that the Bible teaches drinking is a sin we are embellishing the Scriptures no matter how sincere our concerns are about the abuses of alcohol.

Drinking alcohol and principles of wisdom from Scripture.

Having said that drinking is not declared sin in Scripture, it should be added that there are many warnings and examples of the dangers of alcohol. There are certainly enough warnings to merit total abstinence for any believer who would decide to put aside any hindrances in his personal pursuit of the glory of God.

The pursuit of the glory of God requires a sober mind controlled by God's indwelling Spirit. There are numerous warnings concerning the deceitfulness of sin and the tendencies of our fleshly nature. Understanding that our fleshly natures will war against the Spirit brings us to the role of wisdom in decision-making. "Wisdom fills the gaps between the principles, promises, and commands of God. Wisdom always takes all three into account and then asks, 'What is the wise thing for me to do?'" [Charles Stanley, *The Wonderful Spirit Filled Life* (New York: Walker & Co, 1992), p. 373].

We make many decisions that are based upon the principle of wisdom yet are not supported with a direct command from Scripture. For instance, in the Old Testament they practiced both polygamy and slavery but today we do not. The decision is made not because of a direct prohibition from the Bible but on the principle of wisdom.

The Bible warns that drinking can impair our soberness of mind. Priests were warned not to drink wine or strong drink and come into the temple (Leviticus 10:9). King Lemuel was instructed by his mother, "it is not for kings to drink wine" (Proverbs 23:29-35). The Nazarite vow required abstinence from wine and strong drink (Numbers 6:3). The Rechabites were commended for obeying their father's command not to drink wine (Jeremiah 35:2-8). Cloudy judgment may replace the pursuit of the glory of God with the pursuit of pleasure. And since the amount of drink to the point of impaired judgment is undetermined it is always a risk.

The Bible also warns against the addictive nature of alcohol. Wine goes down smoothly but at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper. Despite the ordeal when the person awakes they seek another drink (Proverbs 23:29-35). In the book of Isaiah it is declared that the drunkards of Ephraim had been overcome with wine (Isaiah 28:1).

These are just a few of the numerous warnings in Scripture against the potential for abuse of alcohol. While there is no direct command for abstinence from drink in Scripture there are principles of wisdom that we should apply. Drinking is not cited as sin but it may be detrimental to your physical and spiritual health. Be careful about the decisions you make and determine that nothing will distract you from the pursuit of God's glory.