

# **WINKING AT DRINKING**

## ***“What The Bible Says About The Consumption Of Alcohol As A Beverage”***

**(Proverbs 20:1)**

- Introduction:
1. If the consumption of alcohol as a beverage is an action that is Scriptural, we certainly do not want to “spy out the liberty” of other Christians (Galatians 2:4).
  2. But if on the other hand, the consumption of alcohol as a beverage is unscriptural, we want to resolutely stand and speak out against it.
  3. It also needs to be clear that we are discussing in this outline, the use of alcohol as a *beverage*, not a medicine or remedy.
    - a. I believe that we would all agree that the remedial or therapeutic use of some substances does not argue for their recreational or social use.
  4. In this outline, we want to examine:
    - a. Several common misconceptions about alcohol.
    - b. Arguments often used in an effort to support alcoholic consumption.
    - c. Positive arguments against the drinking of alcoholic beverages.

### **I. Common Misconceptions About The Bible & Alcohol**

#### **A. When “*Wine*” Is Mentioned In The Bible, It Is Always Intoxicating.**

1. Such a view is simply not accurate.
2. If all wine were the same, it would make the Bible sound nonsensical.
  - a. It is a blessing (Ps. 104:15) - and a cursing (Hab. 2:15).
  - b. It is sanctioned (Jn. 2:1-11) - and condemned (Prov. 4:17).
  - c. It brings cheer (Judges 9:13) - and is a mocker (Prov. 20:1).
  - d. It is a spiritual blessing (Is. 55:1) - and brings divine wrath (Ps. 60:3).
3. There are 24 Greek and Hebrew terms in the Bible that have reference to the product of grapes.
  - a. Four of these terms have no reference to anything you would drink (raisin cakes [singular & plural], preserves, and wine-presses).
  - b. Of the twenty terms that are left, only one must refer to an intoxicating beverage.
  - c. Eight terms refer to non-intoxicating beverages.
  - d. And the rest denote beverages that may or may not be intoxicating.
4. In most cases, context must determine whether we are dealing with an intoxicating beverage or a non-intoxicating beverage.
5. Thus, it is incorrect to think that every time you read the word “*wine*” in the Bible, you are reading about what we exclusively use the term wine to denote today.

**B. The Ancients Had No Way To Prevent Fermentation.**

1. This is also an unfounded belief.
2. The people who lived in Bible times did have, and employed methods to prevent fermentation.
3. Several of the methods they employed were:
  - a. Boiling.
    - 1) Fermentation could not take place without the presence of water.
    - 2) Grape juice boils at 212 degrees, and ethyl alcohol evaporates at 172 degrees.
    - 3) Thus, boiling the grapes removed the alcohol.
    - 4) The thick syrup that remained could be preserved up to a year.
  - b. Filtration.
    - 1) By pouring the juice through several filters, the glutton, or the fermentable substance, could be strained out, thus separating the intoxicating properties.
  - c. Sulphur Fumigation.
    - 1) Wine cannot ferment without oxygen.
    - 2) To prevent fermentation, the ancients would fumigate the wine with sulphur which absorbed the oxygen, thus arresting fermentation.
  - d. Air Exclusion.
    - 1) Another method of preventing fermentation by removing oxygen was to line their containers with pitch, making them air tight.
    - 2) Then they would pour the fresh juice into the containers and seal them and often sink them in water.
    - 3) It was said that juice preserved in this manner could remain sweet for a whole year.
  - e. Temperature Reduction.
    - 1) If grape juice can be kept below forty degrees, it will not ferment.
    - 2) They would accomplish this by placing their wine in cold streams.
3. The contention that the ancients had to have drunk intoxicating wine is simply not true.

**II. Passages Which Supposedly Support The Drinking Of Alcohol**

**A. (John 2:1-10).**

1. It is argued that Jesus made intoxicating wine, therefore drinking in moderation must be acceptable.
2. However, such a statement assumes the very thing that must be proved.
3. If this was intoxicating wine, Jesus would have been guilty of sin (Hab. 2:15).

4. The phrase, “*well drunk*” (methusthosin) simply has a generic reference to being full or filled, without reference to the kind of liquid used. It does not imply a state of drunkenness, but a state of fullness (Ps. 23:5).
  5. It is also supposed by some that the “*good wine*” was intoxicating wine.
    - a. It is common knowledge that in antiquity, men regarded wine, in an unfermented state, as of a higher quality than any other.
    - b. Pliny, Plutarch, and Horace all mention that the best wine was that which was destitute of spirit.
- B. (Luke 7:31-35).
1. In this passage, the enemies of Jesus accused him of being a winebibber.
  2. However, in this same passage they also accused him of gluttony and charged John the Baptist with having a demon. Are we to believe these charges as well?
  3. These are trumped up charges by the enemies of Jesus.
  4. The admission that Jesus came “*drinking wine*” has no reference to the nature of this wine, but is simply a contrast to John, the Nazerite, who was forbidden to partake of any form of the fruit of the vine (Numbers 6:1-4).
- C. (Acts 2:13).
1. The apostles were accused of drunkenness when they began to speak in tongues on the day of Pentecost.
  2. In response, Peter did not argue that they were sober upon the basis that they didn’t drink alcoholic beverages, but he argued that it was too early in the morning to be drunk.
  3. However, consider this point: The fact that “*a*” reason is given for abstaining from a particular activity, does not necessarily indicate that there are not other reasons for abstaining.
  4. If I told you that Jesus came to earth in order to show us what God was like, would that exclude all other reasons for His coming, such as to die for man?
- D. (Colossians 2:16).
1. It is argued that we have no right to judge another person in regards to what they eat or drink.
  2. This is true if kept in context.
    - a. Paul was talking about Gnostic asceticism that placed a large number of regulations upon people concerning what they could or could not eat or drink.
    - b. In the context of these man made rules, Paul said to let no one judge you in such matters - these matters were not binding upon them.
  3. However, to remove this passage from its context and then apply it to social drinking is careless and irresponsible with the text.
    - a. What if we used this same approach with Romans 14:13.
      - 1) The context has reference to matters of opinion.
      - 2) Divorce this passage from that context and one may argue for no condemnation of sinful acts and people.

- E. (I Timothy 3:8; Titus 2:3).
1. It is argued that since deacons and older women are not to be given to “*much*” wine, they may imbibe in moderate amounts.
  2. To view the word “*much*” in contrast with “*little*” rather than as a superlative is incorrect and misses the point.
    - a. (Ecc. 7:17) Be not overly wicked.
    - b. (James 1:21) Putting off all overflowing of wickedness.
    - c. (I Peter 4:4) Same excess of riot.
    - d. (I Timothy 3:8) Not greedy of filthy lucre.
  3. Elders are forbidden to partake of wine.
    - a. Are elders held to a higher *moral* standard than anyone else?
    - b. If it is morally reprehensible for an elder to do something, would it not also be morally reprehensible for any Christian to do the same thing?
    - c. Do God’s moral standards differ from person to person?
- F. (I Timothy 5:23).
1. It is argued that since Paul instructed Timothy to drink some wine, we must be permitted to do so today as well.
  2. Such an appeal is really grasping for straws for at least two reasons:
    - a. The use of this wine is clearly medicinal in nature and has nothing whatsoever to do with imbibing wine as a beverage.
      - 1) If my pharmacist recommended codeine for some ailments I had, could I then assume that social or recreational use of that same substance is permissible?
    - b. It is an assumption that the wine spoken of in this context is an intoxicating wine.
      - 1) Pliny, Columella, and Philo all stated that wines which were destitute of all strength were exceedingly wholesome and useful to the body.
      - 2) Pliny stated that wines most adapted to the sick were wines that had their forces broken by the strainer.

### III. Positive Prohibitions Against The Consumption Of Alcohol As A Beverage

- A. The Bible condemns drunkenness.
1. (Ephesians 5:18).
  2. (Galatians 5:21).
  3. Those who uphold “social drinking” do so with the idea of condemning drunkenness, not moderation.
    - a. The implication is that there is a clear distinction to be made between drunkenness and moderation.
  4. However, this cannot merely be assumed, it must be proven.
  5. The American Medical Association has stated that “There is no minimum blood alcohol concentration which can be set at which there will be absolutely no effect.”

6. The drunk and the social drinker differs only in degree, not in kind.
- B. The meaning of the word “drunkenness.”
1. The word “drunkenness” (methuo) which is used in Ephesians 5:18 denotes more than what many realize.
  2. W.E. Vine - “To make drunk, or to grow drunk, *marking the process of the state expressed*, to become intoxicated.
  3. Young & Haynes - “To begin to be softened.”
  4. E.W. Bullinger - “To grow drunk.”
  5. Thayer - “To get drunk, to become intoxicated.”
- C. (Romans 14:21).
1. If drinking in moderation were an optional matter (which I am not willing to concede) it would have to be governed and prohibited by Romans 14:21.
  2. There is no debate concerning the harm one’s influence could have upon others if they drank alcoholic beverages.
- D. Realism.
1. I have yet to talk to someone who claims to be a social drinker who hasn’t, at some point in their drinking life, admitted to getting a “buzz.”
  2. I am forced to wonder if the social drinker who never gets drunk is not a mirage. Does such a creature really exist?

- Conclusion:
1. Having weighed the evidences, I am convinced that the Bible as well as medical science state that drunkenness is a process that begins with the first drink and continues to worsen with each subsequent drink.
  2. Alcohol, used as a drug has its use; but as a beverage it is abused.
  3. Alcohol as a beverage deprives, destroys, deceives, and eventually will damn those who flirt with it.
  4. (Proverbs 20:1).

**“If when you say alcohol, you mean the devil’s brew, the poison scourge, the bloody monster that defiles innocence, deadens reason, destroys homes, creates misery and poverty; if you mean the drink that ruins righteous living, creates despair, shame, and helplessness, and kills thousands every year, then certainly, I am against it with all my power!**

**“However, if when you say alcohol, you mean the oil of conversation, the philosophic wine, the drink that makes hearts merry and puts laughter on one’s lips; if you mean the drink that celebrates Christmas cheer, puts a spring in your walk, and stimulates conversation between good old fellows; if you mean the drink, the sale of which provides**

money for crippled children, the aged, the building of highways, hospitals, and schools, then certainly, I stand firmly in favor of it!

**“This is my stand on alcohol, and I simply refuse to compromise!”**

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*“Bible Wines: Laws Of Fermentation And Wines Of The Ancients”* by William Patton (Star Bible Publications, 1981).

*“The Bible And Social Drinking”* by W.D. Jeffcoat (Robinson Typesetting, 1987).