

Series: Questions

Topic: Is it okay for a Christian to drink alcohol?

We live in the south. We live in the Bible belt. In churches in other countries, and in other parts of the world, this isn't a big deal. In fact, it didn't become a big deal until about a hundred years ago here in this country.

Our attitude toward alcohol may well be conditioned by our culture more than we realize. Since the days of Prohibition, many believers have simply assumed that partaking of alcoholic beverages was sinful. What is interesting is that in many other countries God-fearing Christians see no problem with alcoholic beverages.

Depending on your church background or denomination, you have strong opinions on this subject. I grew up in a very traditional church that taught that drinking was sinful. I was told that the Bible said that Christians shouldn't drink. So throughout high school, and throughout college....I never drank.

Many churches won't talk about this issue at all because it's too much of a lightning rod. But we don't stay away from the difficult topics here. Not going to fight with you over this...not going to let this divide us. And I could be wrong.

First Question: What does the Bible say about drinking?

All Bible believing Christians agree that drunkenness is a sin.

"Do not be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you." – Ephesians 5:18

The Bible is abundantly clear that drunkenness is a sin (Deuteronomy 21:20; Ecclesiastes 10:17; Matthew 24:29; Luke 12:45; 21:34; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Peter 4:3). What ELSE does the Bible say?

145 Positive references

- 27 references to an abundance of wine as an example of God's blessing
- 25 references to use of wine in offerings or sacrifices
- 9 references to wine being used as a gift
- Psalm 104 says God gave wine to make glad the heart of man.

40 Negative references

- 17 warnings against abusing alcohol
- 19 examples of people abusing alcohol
- 3 references to selecting leaders
- 1 verse advocating abstinence if it causes a brother to stumble

62 Neutral references

- 33 symbolic references (example...the wine of His wrath)
- 21 references to people taking vows of abstinence (A Nazarite vow, for example, which also included the prohibition of cutting hair. They also vowed not to eat anything that was from the vine, so if you take a Nazarite vow today, you shouldn't eat Raisin Bran.
- 4 references to people being falsely accused of being drunk (including Jesus)

From scripture, we see that it's the abuse of alcohol that is condemned, not alcohol itself. Kind of like the verse that says "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." (1 Timothy 6:10) Money is not bad, but it can be used for harm.

A hamburger at McDonalds isn't bad for you, but eating too many of them is bad. Driving a car could potentially be dangerous, but that doesn't mean you should walk everywhere. Alcohol by itself is neither good nor bad. It's amoral. Its use determines whether it's good or bad. Nowhere does the Bible say that you can't drink alcohol. **Abuse is condemned; use is allowed.**

"Do you suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the object which is abused? Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall we then prohibit and abolish women?" - Martin Luther

Bible Mis-Interpretation #1: The wine in the Bible wasn't really wine.

- If the wine in Jesus' day wasn't alcoholic, then why all the warnings about getting drunk. Why would Ephesians tell us not to be drunk with wine if wine wasn't alcoholic?
- The Bible uses a word for grape juice and a different word for wine. Numbers 6:3. The Hebrew and Greek and Aramic languages all had a word for grape juice and a word for wine. The disciples were accused of being drunk...you can't get drunk on grape juice.
- When the Bible says wine, it means wine. When it says hell, it means hell. You can't just redefine words to get the Bible to say what you want it to say.

Bible Mis-Interpretation #2: It was really watered down wine. 3 Parts water/1 Part Wine.

- If it were watered down wine, then you'd have to drink gallons and gallons of it to get drunk. The only place in the Bible where wine is mixed with water for consumption is Isaiah 1:21. There, the process is condemned, because merchants are robbing customers.
- Fermented wine was around thousands of years before Christ. For 200 years while Christianity, do you think that alcoholic beverages disappeared, and then just came back?

Second Question: Did Jesus drink wine?

John 2:1-11 describes **Jesus first miracle**, which was turning water into wine. Not just a couple glasses. It was anywhere between 120 and 180 gallons. **John 2:10 said, "Every man sets out the good wine first, then after the guests have drunk freely, the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."**

The Bible tells us that John the Baptist had taken a vow of abstinence, so the Pharisees accused him of being possessed by a demon. Jesus apparently hadn't taken such a vow, so the **Pharisees accused Jesus of being a drunk.** **Matthew 11:19 "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."**

Third Question: Are there reasons not to drink? Sure there are.

- Against the law. The Bible teaches that we are to obey the laws of the land, and that we are to submit to authority. If you're under 21, and you consume alcohol, you are breaking the law and you are sinning.
- Conscience. God has given us all a conscience, and we are not supposed to violate that. You have freedom in Christ, but you also have a brain. You should not try and get someone else to violate their conscience on this issue. That's causing your brother to stumble.
- Wisdom. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should. I know many people who grew up in homes where alcohol was abused, and who saw the effects of alcohol. So very wisely, they choose to abstain. That's honorable, Godly and a good decision. Drinking to fit in or be cool isn't Biblical...we must examine those motives.