

# Should a Christian Drink Alcohol?

## Introduction

All Christians know and agree that getting drunk is a sin. That is not a debated topic because scripture clearly condemns drunkenness. However, alcohol is still a very controversial topic. Drinking alcohol to the point of drunkenness is sin, but that doesn't necessarily condemn all consumption of alcohol.

Here is the controversy:

- Can Christians drink some alcohol? Can christian participate in social drinking as long as they don't get drunk?

My personal conviction:

- I am strongly convicted that Christians in this society should completely abstain from alcohol and social drinking. I abstain from all alcohol because it would be sinful for me to do otherwise, and by the end of this sermon, I want you to agree that I would be sinning if I drank any alcohol. I also hope that you will adopt the same conviction for yourself.

Judgment call:

- When the Bible doesn't make a specific assertion, we have to make a judgment call. We need to be careful though. When we consider something to be a "judgment call", we might think that any conclusion is an acceptable one. This isn't true. We need to consider all scripture and wisely make a conclusion about the best thing to do. Concerning alcohol, the totality of scripture makes me certain that our choices of consuming are very limited.

## Drunkenness is Sin

We would all agree on this point, but let's hear it from scripture again.

- Those who get drunk will not inherit the kingdom of God
  - I Cor 6:10: Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God
- Drunkenness is a condemned deed of the flesh
  - Gal 5:19-21: Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God
- Drunkenness keeps us from behaving properly

- Rom 13:13: Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts

### Why is it sinful?

- It is important to note that the consumption of alcohol is not the sin (i.e. cough syrup)
- It is important to note that the state of being mentally inhibited isn't sinful (i.e. head trauma, mentally disabled)
- The sin is the **deliberate choice** to consume something that will remove ability to think, reason, and behave properly. The consumption of alcohol to the point of drunkenness is a deliberate choice to present yourself to sin, and thus the choice to be drunk is sin of itself.

Eph 5:18: And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit

- Look at the context. We are given many commands:
  - Imitate God (1)
  - Walk in love like Christ (2)
  - Not even a hint of sexual immorality among you (3)
  - No corrupts words from your mouth (4)
  - Walk as children of light (8)
  - Try to discern what is pleasing to God (10)
  - Take no part in darkness, but expose it (11)
- How in the world are we supposed to live that way? How can we walk so uprightly?
  - We need to walk carefully with wisdom (15)
  - Make the most of your time while you can, because it's evil out there. You've got to be prepared to handle it (16)
  - You can't be foolish.
- So how do we walk wisely? Make the most of our time? Keep from foolishness?
  - You need to be filled with the Spirit by singing and engaging in spiritual activity
  - You can NOT be getting drunk with wine!

It's hard enough to walk worthily of God's calling when we're sober. To consume any alcohol to the point of hindering any rationality and reason is so foolish that it's sinful.

EX: I'm on the track team. I've got to run a mile for a competition. I'm not going to eat so much pizza that I get full. Just a slice. How does my coach feel about that? Is he upset? Have I disappointed him and failed the team?

Lev 10:8-9: And the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying, "Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations

- God commands them to have no alcohol whatsoever when working in the temple.
- Why?
  - There is a risk of death?
- How?
  - They could have their reasoning hindered, and make mistakes, and be killed by God for not following Him properly. With their reasoning hindered, they could fail to treat God as holy by following His commands.
  - This command is given to Aaron right after his two sons were killed by God because they didn't obey God's commands perfectly when making sacrifices.

- Rom 12:1-2: I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
  - How can we be priest offering our self as an acceptable sacrifice to God if we are drinking alcohol?

If you have any concerns about getting drunk, if you've got any worries about getting drunk, if you've been drunk in the past, if even crosses your mind that you need to be extra careful about how much you drink, you have NO business drinking alcohol whatsoever. Alcohol takes away your reasoning and inhibitions. While sober, you know you can't drink too much, but how are you supposed to have that same reasoning after a few drinks?

If while sober, you have that nagging feeling in your conscience that drinking isn't really a good idea, then you have no business drinking at all.

Make up your mind, as Daniel did, to not defile yourself with alcohol. Determine to completely abstain for all alcohol always.

Alcohol is usually all or nothing. Give alcohol something, and it will try to take everything. Decide to give no room at all for alcohol, and you will be sober, wise, and able to sacrifice yourself to God.

- I Thess 5:5-8: For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation

## **Can Christians Drink as Long as They Don't Get Drunk?**

But still, if drunkenness is the sin, then shouldn't it be acceptable for Christians to drink alcohol as long as they don't get drunk? Can Christians drink as long as they don't get drunk?

- Superficially this is true, i.e. cough syrup.
- But what about social drinking? Is it acceptable for Christians to drink limited amounts of alcoholic beverages at restaurants or parties?

There are Christians who are able to be responsible and very occasionally drink without getting drunk. There are in fact, unbelievers who can do this as well. So is it appropriate for these people to drink? Do they really need to abstain from alcohol completely if there is no genuine threat of drunkenness?

Why would we drink?

- We like the taste and experience
- It helps us feel more comfortable
- It helps us have a good time
- It helps us fit in with those around us

These reasons are self seeking. There is no good reason to drink. That doesn't necessarily mean it's wrong to drink, but there is no good reason to do it. I eat pizza and watch baseball because I like to. There's no good reason to do that, but it's not wrong; however, there's no spiritual risk of pizza and baseball. There is, however, great spiritual risk of drinking alcohol. If I'm taking spiritual risks for something with no benefit, I need to question my behavior.

## **Biblical Examples of Drinking**

If we want to drink though, we will still look for a reason to justify drinking alcohol. What's the best justification drinking alcohol?

- Many people in the Bible drank wine
- In fact, Jesus turned water into wine for a wedding party.
- Elders and deacons are told that in order to be qualified for their position in the church, they can't be "given to much wine" (1 Tim 3:3, 8). Even though this passage warns against excessive consumption of wine, it does imply that drinking limited amounts of wine is permissible.
- How can someone prohibit drinking if we have Biblical examples of drinking?

First, let's consider some circumstantial and cultural differences between the consumption of wine in Biblical times, and social drinking today.

### **Different levels of alcohol content in wine**

Wine is made from grapes that, overtime, ferment and produce alcohol. Today's wine is very alcoholic. The majority American wine is 11% alcohol.

However, first century wine isn't necessarily this alcoholic. First, wine refers to the fact it's made from grapes, not alcohol. However, in that hot climate with no refrigerators, what would quickly happen to grape juice? It would ferment. Therefore, wine wasn't just an alcoholic drink, it was a juice where people had to exercise responsibility over it's alcoholic content, and amount of consumption.

So it would be very common for people to responsibly drink wine as a common drink, not as an beverage for the purposes of the effects of alcohol.

### **Mixing water and wine**

Still, if wine was the common beverage, they would quickly become drunk. What was the solution? They would mix wine and water. This isn't just what Christians or Jews did. This is what the entire society did. It wasn't based on any religious conviction. It was just the practical way of drinking fluids.

Examples of mixing water and wine

- Taken from [www.winespectator.com](http://www.winespectator.com)
  - A question-answer-forum, a wine connoisseur responds to the question:
    - Did the Romans mix water and wine? Why?
  - Here is the answer:
    - "It's true that ancient Greeks and Romans mixed water and wine—but technically they were putting wine into their water more than they were putting water into their wine.

Back then, wine was seen as a way to purify and improve the taste of the (often stagnant) water source.”

Aside from the desirable flavor of grapes, the alcohol would cleanse the water of impurities. They didn't have water filters. The alcohol was a means of ridding the water of impurities.

There are examples of other secular writings confirming this practice:

- Homer's *Odyssey*: 1/20 wine and water mixture
- Hippocrates says, “twenty parts of water to one part of the Thracian wine to be the proper beverage.”
- More commonly the ratio would be 1/8 or 1/3 parts wine to water (Pliny, *Natural History* XIV, vi, 54; Athenaeus, *The Learned Banquet*).
- Jewish society taught the same:
  - One section (Shabbath 77a) states that wine which does not carry at least 3 parts of water is not wine. It would be considered a strong drink.
  - Strong drink was the Hebrew word for an alcoholic beverage for intoxication.

Thus, the wine we are speaking of when reading the Bible was actually water with wine mixed in. It was the common everyday use beverage. Not something people drank for the purpose of getting drunk, though irresponsible consumption would've lead to drunkenness.

Consider how little it takes for me to be drunk. I can't live off of 15 oz of liquid a day.

- 10 oz = Feeling of well-being, relaxation, lower inhibitions, sensation of warmth. Euphoria. Some minor impairment of reasoning and memory, lowering of caution. Your behavior may become exaggerated and emotions intensified (Good emotions are better, bad emotions are worse)
- 15 oz = 0.07-0.09 BAC: Slight impairment of balance, speech, vision, reaction time, and hearing. Euphoria. Judgment and self-control are reduced, and caution, reason and memory are impaired, .08 is legally impaired and it is illegal to drive at this level. You will probably believe that you are functioning better than you really are.

I'm drunk by 10-15 oz of liquid. This is not the kind of wine Jesus made.

We can't use these Biblical examples to endorse drinking highly alcoholic wine on a regular basis.

### **Our modern culture**

Consider some other things about our modern culture:

- We have an abundance of desirable non-alcoholic things to drink.
- We have unlimited purified safe water.

The reasons they would mix wine into their water don't apply to us today. We have no reason to consume any amount of alcoholic beverage that hinders and impedes our behavior.

Also, we live in a drunk culture. Today, people consume alcohol for the purposes of getting drunk. Getting drunk is what people do. It has become a source of boasting and competition. It has become a regular practice of people's weeks. Drunkenness is such a part of this culture

that young people have been known to consume hand sanitizer in order to get a buzz. When we drink alcohol, this is the culture that we are buying into, whether or not we get drunk.

## Why We Should Completely Abstain From Alcohol

All that being said, there are still people who drink occasionally and don't get drunk. Why should those people abstain from alcohol? Why should they stop drinking if they aren't getting drunk? Why should they stop drinking if they aren't hurting anyone? Well, my point is, they might think they aren't hurting anyone, but I believe strongly they are. Christians participating in social drinking is a great stumbling block that harms their brother.

### I Corinthians 8: Being a stumbling block for your brother

I Corinthians 8 is a passage that helped me come to the conclusion that a christian drinking is a christian being a stumbling block for his brother.

- 4-6:
  - The Corinthian christians were wondering if it was acceptable to eat things sacrificed to idols.
  - Some brothers had knowledge and sufficiently understood that all idols are fake. They knew that there's only one God, and therefore they knew that the "gods" didn't exist.
- 7:
  - However, not all of the christians really understood this.
  - There were many new christians that had spent their whole life in pagan idolatry. Even though they've accepted Jesus, it's hard for them to fully believe that all the gods are fake.
  - It's kind of like holding on to superstition even after you've become a christian.
  - If these people eat the meat sacrificed to the idol, it's a sin because they will be feeling as if they are worshipping the god, and thus, they are breaking their conscience.
  - So those who knew certainly that there is only one God feel like they can eat the meat sacrificed to the idol without committing the idolatry, but the brother who still believes in the idol would be worshipping if he did participate.
- 9-10:
  - Some felt free that they had the ability and right to eat the idol meat, but they needed to be careful that this freedom didn't cause their other brothers to sin.
  - If your weak brother sees you doing it, it will encourage him to do the same even though he considers it to be sin.
  - You eating in the idol temples makes you a stumbling block leading your brother to sin.
- 11-12:
  - By causing your brother to sin, you are also sinning against Christ.
- 13:
  - For that reason, if eating that meat causes my brother to sin, I should abstain from eating meat all together if necessary.
- Consider Paul's exhortation in I Cor 8:1: knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. They shouldn't be so proud of their great knowledge. Instead, they should be more concerned about doing what's best for their brother.

### The application

How does this apply to drinking?

- There are some who are strong enough to occasionally drink responsibly and not get drunk. Perhaps they can participate in social drinking without hurting themselves, but are they hurting others? Are they hurting their brothers?
- This world is full of drunkenness, and alcohol is so dangerous. If my brothers see me drinking, they will know that drinking is ok. That will encourage them to drink.
- They know they shouldn't get drunk, but are they strong enough to handle drinking without getting drunk? Most people are not.
- So by my encouragement, others are drinking, and eventually getting drunk.
  - What if there are brand new christians? Should we be showing them that it's ok to drink alcohol? Are they strong enough to handle that risky example?
  - What if there are christians who used to struggle with drunkenness and alcohol. They are trying hard to stay away from alcohol and not desire it, but here we are showing that it's not so bad, and that weakens their conviction. They give in and go back to their former ways.
  - What about young people? Do we want them to enter into high school and college with the understanding that drinking is ok? Do you want to tell your kid before he goes to college, "alcohol isn't bad, just don't drink too much." What young person will handle that responsibly?
  - The only helpful thing we can tell people is that they should never drink alcohol ever for any reason.

Don't be a stumbling block:

- Rom 14:13: Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother
- Rom 14:20: Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats
- Rom 14:21: It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble
- Rom 14:23: But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

**I COR 8:10, MAT 18:6, IF BY MY DRINKING A LITTLE BIT I ENCOURAGE MY BROTHER TO GET DRUNK, I AM A STUMBLING BLOCK AND AM GUILTY OF CONDEMNATION**

**TO THE WEAK I BECAME THE WEAK I COR 9:22. IF OTHERS ARE WEAK WITH ALCOHOL, WE MUST CHANGE OUR LIFESTYLE TO HELP THEM IN THEIR WEAKNESS.**

### **My example**

I'm a Bible teacher. That means I'm supposed to be living according to Biblical teaching, and thus, my life will be a representative to people of godly living. I've also worked with a lot of young people. If they know that I drink occasionally, that means I'm teaching, it's ok to drink as a Christian. Would they be able to handle that example?

We've got some parents here. "Jami, Marina, I've worked with your kids a lot. Imagine if they knew I drink alcohol occasionally. Would you want me to give them that example? Then they will be in high school and in college. They will think, "as long as I don't get drunk, it's ok to drink with these people, because Tim drinks". God forbid I ever do such a thing.

Here's the world I would be encouraging my kids to go into:

- Alcohol statistics:
  - One in every three families is disrupted by alcohol.

- Alcoholics outnumber other drug addicts 10 to 1
- One in ten social drinkers will become an alcoholic.
- Alcohol is the number one drug problem in this country.
- Alcohol is the number three cause of all deaths, and the number one cause of death by drugs. It outnumbers other drug deaths 33 to 1.
- Alcohol causes at least 50% of all traffic
- Alcohol is responsible for 70% of drowning and chokings.
- Thirty percent of all suicides are alcohol related.
- Over 50% of spousal abuse, falls, and fire deaths are alcohol related.
- 50% of rapes are committed under the influence of alcohol.
- 70% of robberies are related to
- A Michigan study showed alcohol was involved in 55% of child abuse cases, 20% of all divorces, and 40% of all court cases.

I hate alcohol and it's effects. I never want to encourage anyone to have anything to do with it. I can't control how much others will drink. Alcohol is a temptation for this church. How can I help, if I'm drinking myself? That's why I abstain from alcohol completely. So I can prove to other people that they need to stay away. That's what you should do as well.

### **People who abstained**

Let's consider some people who made the decision to completely abstain from alcohol for spiritual purposes:

- Daniel: he was given the king's wine to drink. He didn't have control of the alcohol content of that wine. His decision was to not drink any of it or otherwise be defiled.
- King Lemuel: his mother taught him that in order to be a wise king, he couldn't taste wine or strong drink. This is also in the context of him finding a worthy spouse.
- John the Baptist: he was predetermined to be a Nazarite, so to fulfill that purpose, he never drank wine.
- Paul: Paul wrote to Timothy: "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" (1 Tim 5:23)
  - I speculate that Paul was telling Timothy to not drink wine at all for example's sake, but Timothy was sick frequently. Timothy would need to purifying effects of alcohol in his water to help him with his sickness, so Paul says it would be better for that medicinal purpose. This then leads me to believe that Paul put in to practice what he was commanding Timothy, and Paul himself abstained from wine completely.