

What the Bible Teaches about Drinking Alcohol

Wine and Strong Drink

Introduction:

1. Lesson 1 gave an overview of the Bible's condemnation of drinking alcohol and the resulting drunkenness.
2. Lesson 2 focused on the principles of sobriety and the meaning of drunkenness in the Bible.
3. Yet confusion often arises because of the use of the words "wine" and "strong drink."
 - a. Generally speaking, in the Bible wine is described in negative terms some 54 times (cf. Proverbs 4:17; 20:1; Psalm 60:3).
 - b. It is described in positive terms some 56 times (Psa. 104:14-15; Judges 9:13).
 - c. It is described in neutral terms some 106 times (Joshua 9:4; 1 Samuel 16:20).
4. Because of this, many assume that the negative terms refer to drunkenness, but the positive terms refer to moderate drinking.
5. However, the real issue is a misunderstanding of the word "wine" itself...

I. A Generic Term

- A. The word "milk" is a generic term.
 1. It may refer to sweet milk, whole milk, 2% milk, or buttermilk.
 2. It may refer to cow's milk, goat's milk, or milk from any number of animals.
- B. In modern usage, the word "wine" refers to fermented (fortified) grape juice with alcoholic content.
- C. However, in the Bible the word "wine" is a generic term.
- D. Sometimes it referred to alcoholic, fermented wine (Genesis 9:21; 1 Peter 4:3).
- E. Other times it meant freshly squeezed grape juice (Genesis 40:11 (LXX); 49:11-12; Isaiah 16:10).
- F. On occasion it referenced juice while it was still in the grapes (Isaiah 65:8; Jeremiah 40:10, 12).
- G. At least once it actually referred to the grapevine (Numbers 6:3-4).
- H. It also was used of a thick syrup from grape juice that was sold in the market (Isaiah 55:1) [*compare with the selling of milk*].
- I. Sometimes this was referred to as mixed wine – a thick syrup that had to be mixed with water to be drinkable (Proverbs 9:2, 5).
- J. Clearly, in the Bible the word "wine" is a generic term and does not always refer to an alcoholic beverage.
- K. The same is true of the term "strong drink."
- L. The Hebrew word translated "strong drink" is a generic term for liquid from fruits other than grapes (cf. Deuteronomy 14:26).
 1. Indeed, these juices could be allowed to ferment and become alcoholic drinks.
 2. However, fermentation is not implied by the word itself.
- M. This would be similar to the modern word "cider" – which can be spiced apple juice or can be allowed to ferment into a "hard" alcoholic drink.
- N. It certainly does not refer to modern distilled liquors like whiskey or moonshine!

II. A Contextual Term

- A. Because these words are generic, the context must determine what is meant each time they are used.

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- B. Therefore, when the Bible speaks negatively about wine, it is referring to the poisonous, intoxicating, fermented version.
 - C. When it is described positively, it must be referring to simple grape juice.
- III. An Evolved Term
- A. The modern word “wine” has a demonstrably different meaning than that which is seen in the Scriptures.
 - B. Likewise, wine today is very different from wine in Bible times.
 - C. Modern wine is produced by the process of fermentation, usually followed by the addition of distilled liquors, resulting in fortified wine.
 - 1. Fermentation produces an alcoholic content of 12 – 14%.
 - 2. Sherry has an alcoholic content of 20%.
 - 3. Champagne has an even greater alcoholic content of 23% or more.
 - D. Naturally fermented ciders will have an alcoholic content of 8 – 10%.
 - E. Beer and malt liquors generally have an alcoholic content of 3.5%, while ales have about 9%.
 - 1. It is important to note that the use of hops in brewing beer produces lupulin, which is a narcotic.
 - 2. Hops come from the same plant family as marijuana and produce in beer the same cannabis chemical.
 - F. Whiskey, brandy, rum, and gin, are distilled liquors that have an alcoholic content of 47 -54%.
 - G. These kinds of “wines” and “strong drinks” were unknown in Bible times.

Conclusion: Abstinence is the answer (1 Peter 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:22)!