

What the Bible Teaches about Drinking Alcohol

Medicinal Use of Alcohol

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. Lesson 3 showed the generic nature of the words "wine" and "strong drink," emphasizing the importance of context when studying passages using these words.
4. Many will still contend that moderate drinking of alcohol is approved of by God because the Bible speaks of wine used as a medicine.
 - a. From this principle they quickly assume that self-medicating is a valid use of alcoholic beverages.
 - b. They view alcohol as a means of relaxation and the relief of stress – thus, their use of it in this way is considered medicinal.
5. However, the Bible's teaching on this subject must be examined carefully...

- I. Alcohol for the Suffering (Proverbs 31:1-7)
 - A. The first part of this passage clearly describes the dangers and condemns the consumption of alcoholic beverages (vs. 1-5).
 1. Drinking alcohol robs one of sobriety.
 2. Obviously, a king should be sober when he is ruling a nation and setting an example before it.
 3. It should be noted that Christians are made "kings and priests" by Jesus (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; cf. Leviticus 10:9).
 - B. The second part seems to suggest a medicinal use of alcohol – for those who are suffering emotionally or physically (vs. 6-7).
 1. Those who are perishing seems to refer to those approaching death.
 2. The heavy-hearted are those who are bitter in spirit.
 3. The others simply want to forget their struggles and poverty.
 - C. Does God's Word command that alcohol be given to such individuals?
 1. Many seem to think that this is the accurate reading of this passage.
 2. "Those that have wherewithal must not only give bread to the hungry and water to the thirsty, but they must *give strong drink to him that is ready to perish* through sickness or pain and *wine to those that are melancholy and of heavy heart*; for it was appointed to cheer and revive the spirits, and *make glad the heart* (as it does where there is need of it), not to burden and oppress the spirits, as it does where there is no need of it" (Matthew Henry).
 3. Please consider carefully the previous quotation and its implications.
 - D. However, there are important examples that demonstrate a different meaning.
 1. When Hannah was in "bitterness of soul," she did not drink alcohol but prayed to God (1 Samuel 1:10, 13-16).
 2. When David was distressed, he did not drink alcohol but "encouraged himself in the Lord" (1 Samuel 30:6).
 3. When the Shunammite woman was vexed over the death of her son, she did not drink alcohol but sought out God's prophet (2 Kings 4:27).
 4. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, he helped the injured man by pouring oil and wine into his wounds – not into his mouth (Luke 10:34)!

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5. When Jesus was perishing – dying on the cross – they offered Him wine mixed with myrrh or gall for the purpose of easing His pain, but He would not drink it (Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23)!
 - E. In fact, this passage does not refer to alcohol as a medicine; rather, it emphasizes the difference between a righteous king and a wicked populus.
 1. In essence, the king's mother is saying that if some want to drown their sufferings in alcohol, let them – but the king must not do the same.
 2. "The queen-mother does not recommend a free beer program for the poor or justify its use as an opiate for the masses; her point is simply that the king must avoid drunkenness in order to reign properly. The comparison to the suffering poor and to their use of alcohol is meant to awaken Lemuel to the duties that go with his class and status rather than to describe some kind of permissible drunkenness" (Duane Garrett, professor of Old Testament at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary).
 - F. The Bible does not recommend alcohol for the relief of suffering.
- II. Alcohol for the Sick (1 Timothy 5:23)
- A. Paul's instruction to Timothy is often used in an attempt to justify the moderate drinking of alcohol.
 - B. However, one must consider closely the facts that are stated in this verse.
 1. Timothy was troubled with a stomach ailment of an unknown nature.
 2. As a result, he was instructed to "no longer drink only water," but to "use a little wine" to help his condition (ESV).
 3. The amount of wine to be used was "a little" and it was to be diluted with water.
 4. Clearly, this is a medicinal use of wine, not an example of "social drinking."
 - C. There are also some important implications found in this verse.
 1. Timothy was practicing abstinence from wine, even as a medicine.
 2. It required inspired instruction from an apostle to get Timothy to even use a small amount of wine medicinally.
 - D. Furthermore, there are interesting considerations related to this verse.
 1. The alcoholic condition of the wine is not stated explicitly.
 - a. There are examples of unfermented wine used as medicine.
 - b. Athenaeus wrote: "Let him take sweet wine, either mixed with water or warmed, ...as being very good for the stomach."
 2. The wine may have been used as an antiseptic to purify polluted water rather than a drink with medicinal properties.
 3. There is a difference between the word for "drink" and the word for "use" found in this verse (cf. Acts 27:17).
 - E. It is obvious that Paul was not commanding or approving of the casual, social, or recreational drinking of alcoholic beverages.

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