

Alcoholic Beverages and Christians. Do They Mix?

By Leif Jensen and John Bonin

The Bible does not specifically condemn alcohol. Rather, it condemns drunkenness. The clearest verse is Ephesians 5:18, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit". Additionally, Scripture is replete with verses that condemn drunkenness (c.f. 1 Pet 4:3; Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 5:11 1 Cor 6:10; Gal 5:21). However, it does not forbid alcohol completely. For instance, Paul recommends that Timothy drink, "a little wine" because of its value to help his frequent stomach illnesses (1 Tim 5:23). An elder is not forbidden from the use of wine but must not be "addicted to much wine" (1 Tim 3:8). In other words he must not allow himself to become drunk or become dependent upon alcohol.

There are scholars who believe that the wine used before and during the time of Christ had very low alcohol content due to the process required to preserve it. (<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/wine.htm>) While this may be true, it is entirely beside the point because the Bible forbids the use of any substance that would bring us under its power (1 Cor 6:12), or cause another person to become confused and fall into sin themselves (1 Cor 10:23-24). It is abundantly clear that a Christian should never get drunk or buzzed.

First, we must consider ourselves. Ask yourself: "Is this something that I struggle with...have I ever gotten buzzed more than once and/or drunk before?" If the answer is "yes", avoid drinking alcohol.

Second, we must consider how drinking alcohol might affect other Christians. A brother who has struggled with alcohol may see you drinking, knowing that you are a Christian, and have his conscience negatively impacted. He might feel free to drink again and then fall into sin. In this case you want to be sure that the brother you are with will not stumble because of your drinking (Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 10:23-31). If you think that he might, then clearly you must avoid drinking in his presence. In this case the subject of a Christian drinking falls into the same category Paul speaks about when he says if eating meat would cause my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again. (1 Cor 8:13). However, it is even worse than that because of the addictive possibility. It is reported that one out of every ten people who take their first drink will become alcoholics. (Whether it is one in ten, one in twenty, or whatever, is not the point.) What if a brother who looks up to you sees you taking a drink, follows your lead and becomes an alcoholic? Since practicing alcoholics cannot enter the kingdom of God, you have severely caused that brother to stumble, and then you fall under the admonition Christ spoke of in Mt 8:16 when He said it would be better for us to have a millstone hung around our neck and thrown into the sea than to cause one of these little ones to

stumble. (Many think the little ones Christ spoke of are only “children,” but it could also apply to someone who is a new Christian, or what Paul refers to as a “weaker brother.”)

Lastly, we must consider unbelievers. Many unbelievers observe (very closely) those of us who call ourselves Christians. Will an unbeliever be confused if we drink alcohol? Will he think that Christians are not concerned about getting drunk or buzzed? Will they think you are a hypocrite? While we are to become, “all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:22), we are not to do so in a way that would give us, another brother or an unbeliever justification for sinning (1 Cor 9:19-23).

In summary, the Christian should consider the following:

- Drinking alcoholic beverages can obviously lead to drunkenness (or a buzz) which is clearly defined by Scripture as sin. If you drink, can you rightly divide the line where you become high, or do you realize it after you become high - in which case you have sinned. (If you do this once, repent of your sin, and then do it again, were you really sincere in your repentance? Or are you in a revolving door or treadmill of habitual sin?)
- Even if drinking does not lead to drunkenness, it can lead to a craving or dependence (to relax at the end of the day, for example, or “I am just being sociable”.)
- A weaker brother or sister may
 - think that it is sin, but because they see you drinking, they follow you into (what they think to be) sin because they look up to you as an older/wiser Christian. If they drink, thinking it is a sin, they are sinning. (Acts 23:1, 24:16, Rom 2:14-15, 13:5, Jas 4:17).
 - see you drinking and conclude that drinking is permissible for Christians, and then drink too much and become drunk (or high) - in which case your example leads someone else to sin.
 - see you drinking, conclude that drinking is permissible for Christians, and become an alcoholic.

Drinking (in and of itself) is not a sin as long as it does not lead to drunkenness or a buzz. However, the CAVEAT “in and of itself” is more far-reaching than most can imagine, as enumerated above. Upon serious reflection you may discover that:

1. if you do drink and have to closely monitor yourself so as not to cross the line into a buzz, and
2. make sure you are not observed by anyone who may stumble at your example,

you may decide that the consequences of drinking are so potentially devastating that they far outweigh any possible advantages, in which case you might as well not drink at all.

In conclusion, the decision to drink or not to drink alcoholic beverages should be your personal decision, based on prayer and your own study of the Scriptures. We hope this proves to be beneficial in helping you sort through this serious issue.

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