

Theme: Alcohol

Series: A Theology for Living

### TO DRINK OR NOT TO DRINK

If you come home and have to drink several beers to relax, you probably have a problem with alcohol. If you come to a party with your own bottle even though the party is an alcohol free party, you probably have problems with alcohol. If you can't talk to people without taking a drink, you probably have problems with alcohol. If you refuse to go to a party where alcohol is not served, you probably have a problem with alcohol. If you insist that people you do business with must drink with you, you have a problem with alcohol. If you go to a party and make a big deal out of the fact that you are drinking, you probably have a problem with alcohol. You don't drink all week but drink all weekend, you probably have a problem with alcohol. If you drink just to be one of the gang, you probably have a problem with alcohol. If you drink to deal with unpleasant memories, you probably have a problem with alcohol. If you buy extra liquor just to make sure you don't run out over the weekend you probably have a problem with alcohol. And if you have to drink just to look at your spouse, you may just have an ugly spouse.

There is no doubt that all sorts of societal ills are associated with alcohol. If you have been raised with an alcoholic parent or lived with an alcoholic spouse, you know the difficulty and you probably have a different view of alcohol that many others have. To this day, it is involved in 50% of the deaths of teenagers. It is the cause of 41,000 deaths on the nation's highways every year. And it is one of the major causes of divorce.

Alcoholism is a self-imposed disease. And it is a social problem and it is a spiritual problem. However, alcohol is often used as an excuse for stupid and sinful behavior. I know of one pastor who was caught going skinny dipping with the co-chairperson of the pastor search committee while have a good time on a party barge. His excuse was that he and she had drank too much wine.

We Baptists have had our issues with alcohol. Our denomination is officially against drinking. It was a major issue at the SBC this past year and the year before. However, 20 years ago, studies found that 50% of Baptists drank alcohol as a beverage. And 50% of those who drank had problems with alcohol. I would guess that today, as many as 85% of Baptist drink.

The Bible has a lot to say about alcohol. It is hard to say if there are more positives or negatives. You will find warnings and praise for wine. And it is used as a symbol of salvation and blessing and death and destruction.

The Bible speaks of wine and strong drink. It is real wine, it is not grape juice. In the kind of weather you find in Israel, grape juice stated fermenting immediately after the grapes were crushed. I have heard little old ladies say “my Jesus would never make wine.” But he did, it was the kind which contains alcohol. No one knows exactly what strong drink refers to. Some think it is beer. But it seems that strong drink does not refer to distilled spirits like whiskey because distillation of alcohol was not invented until the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Proverbs constantly warns its readers about the abuse of alcohol. This text for today nails the effects of it. Who has a woe? Who has a contention, who has the redness of eyes? Depressed and drunk, drunk and wanting to fight, drunk and eyes burning red and blurred vision are apt descriptions.

He describes the seduction of wine, the taste, the sparkles in the cup, it deep redness. But then it bites you like a viper. Your eyes see strange things and your mind utterly perverse things. Then you are dizzy, staggering to and fro like one who lies down on the waves of the sea or the one who tries to sleep on the top of the mast as the ship rides the waves.

He describes the sickness. They stuck me but I did not become ill sounds like the enviable result of drinking. Once when I was about 14 I spent the week with my cousin and one night I went out with him. He got drunk. Later that night, he was glassy-eyed and driving. Suddenly he lunged over and got sick and decided to throw up on my side of the car, on the floorboard. I opened the door thinking for a brief second I had to get out of here. Then I remember calling myself an idiot, thinking we are going 60 MPH down an old country road, I can't jump out. Thirty minutes later, sitting in a parking lot in Bolivar talking to a woman, she bent over and kissed him. And I remember thinking, *girl, if you knew what just passed through those lips a few minutes ago, you would not be doing that!* She must have been drunk too!

Then comes the hangover. They stuck me, they beat me and I did not know it. He woke up and felt as if he had been beaten up. His head hurt, his body ached. His ears hurt to hear and his joints felt out of place. But what does the manly drinker do? Does he have wisdom and quit? Does he decide to warn others of the danger? No, he looks for his next round, “I will seek another drink.”

The Bible has a lot of warnings to the drunk. In the New Testament, the church is told not to associate with a drunk ( 1Cor, 5:11). And Paul says that a drunk will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1Cor. 6:10). There are at least two groups of people who are said to not drink in the Old Testament, the Nazirite ( Nu. 6:1-4) and Rechabites (Jer. 35). It was forbidden for priests, who

ministered in the central Sanctuary, to drink wine (Lev. 10:9).

Yet, for all its warnings, the Bible never declares drinking alcohol to be a sin. In fact, it is used to celebrate, in worship and feasts, and it was used in the Lord's Supper. Wine is praised as making the heart merry.

Jesus made wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2: 1&ff). He was accused of being a drunkard (mat 11:19). And Jesus said he would not drink wine with the disciples again until he drinks it anew with his disciples in the Kingdom of Heaven (Mat. 26:27).

Wine was used as a medicine. Wine and oil was used to minister to the needs of the wounded man in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach (1 Tim. 5:23).

So, what are to conclude? Well, not drinking at all is probably the wisest or best choice under most circumstances. No one ever became an alcoholic by not drinking. But this is how I see it. If the doctor tells you to drink wine for your cholesterol or other health reasons, it should not be a problem. If you use wine in cooking, most, if not all, of the alcohol cooks out and that should not be a problem. We take a step up toward danger when we use wine at meals. But if all you do is an occasional glass of wine with a meal, you are probably in no more danger than its use for health reasons. The body makes enough enzymes to metabolize two servings of alcohol a day for men and one per day for women. The rest is used to metabolize the alcohol that is naturally made in your body each day.

From here, it gets dangerous. If you drink several drinks a day, if you get drunk, these kinds of things are certainly sinful according to Scripture.

But there is one more thought we need to consider. Paul said: Romans 14:21-23

21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.  
22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Your wine or beer or any other kind of alcoholic drink is not worth your witness. And I know that in this very church people have caused others to stumble in their faith because they drank. We are all responsible to do whatever we can to help our brothers and sisters to grow in Spirit. We are responsible for each other's souls. No one's spiritual state is worth a drink.

To drink or not to drink is ultimately your decision, a matter of conscience. You have enough room to make good choices. But, our call as Christians is to make the best choice.