

Tuesday, August 5, 2014 – The Social Drinking Myth

It is unfortunate but we live in a society where drinking alcohol is considered both normal and acceptable. Drinking beer, wine, whiskey, and other beverages that contain alcohol, and therefore make one drunk, is a very old practice. Christians are not immune to the enticement of alcohol. What I find ironic is their use of scriptures to try to justify what is very clearly sin.

We often hear the comments, "It's all right if I have a beer or two in the privacy of my own home, isn't it? It is not a sin to drink alcohol so long as I don't get drunk, right? Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomachs sake, so it must be OK to drink a little, right?" How many times have we all heard statements and questions such as these? How many times have we ourselves asked these things? Well, the answer to all these questions is simple...No. Before you discount what I have to say as the ravings of a person who has never partaken in alcohol, understand this: for an eighteen-month period of time 20 years ago, I had a serious drinking problem. A problem that I didn't acknowledge or take seriously until I woke up one morning in my hotel room with no clue how I got there. It was a 7-mile drive to my hotel, mostly on highway. It is only by the grace and providence of God nothing devastating happened.

The first time drinking is mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis, chapter 9. Noah, a righteous man, became drunk and lay naked in his tent. This good man had his sense of right and wrong dulled by the evil effects of drinking. In Genesis 19, we read of another righteous man, Lot, who was overcome by the evil effects of alcohol. While drunk, he had sexual relations with his own daughters! Again, a good man lost his sense of right and wrong when under the influence of alcohol. The writer of Proverbs warned: **"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whoever is deceived thereby is not wise"** (Proverbs 20:1).

Some people try to support their sinful habit of drinking by going to the Bible. They point out that some passages in the Bible speak of drinking wine as a good thing (**Genesis 14:18; Amos 9:14; Zechariah 10:7, etc**). But there are also many other passages which condemn the drinking of wine (**Genesis 9:20,21; 19:30-35; Leviticus 10:8-10; Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4,5; Daniel 1:8; Isaiah 5:22; 28:7; Habakkuk 2:15**). How can the drinking of wine be both commended and condemned? Does the Bible contradict itself? If it does, then it cannot be the Word of God!

The Bible does not contradict itself. The Bible is the Word of God. A correct understanding of the word "wine" in the Bible depends upon the meaning of the words that are translated "wine" in our English Bible. The Old Testament was first written in the

Hebrew language. There are eleven different Hebrew words that are all translated "wine." The New Testament was first written in Greek. There are two different Greek words that are translated "wine" in our English New Testament.

"Jesus drank wine," people tell us. "He even turned water into wine. How can you claim that drinking alcoholic beverages is wrong?" Whole books have been written to answer this question, but here is a brief reply.

To equate modern alcoholic beverages with first-century wine is a serious error. Modern beverages are fortified with alcohol, enabling the manufacturer to increase the alcoholic content to as much as 90% (such as in 180-proof vodka). First-century wine, dependent as it was on natural fermentation, never had an alcoholic content greater than 10%.

When the Lord was in attendance at the wedding feast of Cana, the host's supply of "wine" failed (John 2:1ff). Christ commanded that six stone waterpots, each with a twenty to thirty gallon capacity, be filled. The servants filled them "to the brim." Underline this last phrase, for it shows that there was no possibility of anyone adding some foreign substance so as to feign the appearance of wine. Moreover, the "taste" test clearly identified the newly manufactured liquid as wine indeed (9-10).

Many folks, upon reading this context, automatically assume that the wine mentioned here was an intoxicating spirit. Doubtless this assumption is made due to the fact that when we hear the term "wine" in our modern culture that is what we ordinarily think of. In the Bible, however, "wine" is a generic term and it can denote either fresh juice or a fermented beverage; the context must determine which.

Underline the word "wine" in John 2:9 and in your margin write: *See Isaiah 16:10; Joel 2:24.* Isaiah speaks of the "wine in the presses" and Joel writes about the presses that overflow with wine. Obviously, the wine is what we would call grape juice. In biblical language, therefore, wine need not be an intoxicant.

The claim is sometimes made, though, that in Bible times there was no method for preserving grape juice in an unfermented state. Therefore, "wine" must have had some alcoholic content. That is not true. The **Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary** cites ancient skills for the preservation of grape juice all year long. In your margin you may wish to write this note: *See ZPBD, p. 895.*

It is known, from ancient sources, that there were ways of preserving juice, thus preventing fermentation. The ancient Roman statesman, Cato, said: "If you wish to have

must [grape-juice] all year, put grape-juice in an amphora and seal the cork with pitch; sink it in a fishpond. After 30 days take it out. It will be grape-juice for a whole year” Professor R. Laird Harris in **Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament** tells us: “All the wine [of Bible times] was light wine, i.e., not fortified with extra alcohol.

Concentrated alcohol was only known in the Middle Ages when the Arabs invented distillation ('alcohol' is an Arabic word) so what is now called liquor or strong drink (i.e., whiskey, gin, etc.) and the twenty per cent fortified wines were unknown in Bible times. Beer was brewed by various methods, but its alcoholic content was light. The strength of natural wines is limited by two factors. The percentage of alcohol will be half of the percentage of the sugar in the juice. And if the alcoholic content is much above 10 or 11 percent, the yeast cells are killed and fermentation ceases. Probably ancient wines were 7-10 percent. To avoid the sin of drunkenness, mingling of wine with water was practiced. This dilution was specified by the Rabbis in NT times for the wine customary at Passover”

First-century wine was always diluted with water. The proportion varied from 1 part wine to 1 part water (1:1) to as thin as 1:20, with a common dilution being 1:6. This means that first-century wine was never stronger than 6% alcohol, and often was only 2% or less. One would have to drink large amounts to get drunk on a 2% mix.

This question is quite appropriate: “Would Jesus Christ have provided some 120 to 180 gallons of alcoholic beverage for a wedding feast?” No one with any degree of respect for New Testament morality would suggest such (**1 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:21**).

Practically speaking, people make distinctions between various degrees of intoxication. A common definition equates being “drunk” with the later stages of the drinking process. Defining *when* a person is drunk is generally avoided, but we can tell when a person is definitely drunk: Stumbling, slurring words, passed out. The government has passed its own legislation to determine drunkenness based on the amount in the blood. This is arbitrary! This definition is a myth/error.

Drunkenness must be considered a process. It must be seen in degrees of drunkenness. It is incorrect to say that there is some line between “tipsy” and “drunk” for they are the same thing, only different in degree. The existence of “drunkenness” is not determined by *amount*. However, the *degree* of drunkenness is determined by *amount*. One may be *more* drunk than another, but we are still discussing a degree of drunkenness. Even after the FIRST DRINK, we no longer discuss whether a person is sober or drunk--only *how drunk* he is!

Many people believe that alcoholic drinks other than hard liquor do little harm to their body. This is wrong! Ethyl alcohol is poison. The cells in your brain and nervous system are very delicate and easily damaged. It is natural that they would be most easily damaged.

Try this experiment – take an eyedropper and put 1,000 drops of water in a glass. Add 4-5 drops of ink. When alcohol reaches that same concentration you are about to lose control and fall into a coma. Another drop or two your heart is affected. The center in your brain that regulates breathing becomes sedated.

Consider this interesting quotation from the **Encyclopedia of Christianity** (111, 457) “Modern study of the effects of alcohol shows that it is an anesthetic, which means that it affects the higher centers of the brain that regulate morals and judgment before it affects perception or motor coordination. Christians should know and be aware that even minimal use has some influence upon these higher centers. Also, alcoholic beverages are generally used in much the same way and for the same reasons as dangerous drugs. Since man has the inherent tendency to excuse himself, these factors should cause Christians to question strongly any claims of liberty with regard to their use.”

The consumption of alcohol violates every biblical passage which views the body as the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (**1 Cor. 6:19**), as an instrument of righteousness (**Rom. 6:12-13**), and as a living sacrifice unto God (**Rom. 12:1**). No devout Christian can bow his head and offer thanks to his Creator before drinking alcohol.

It is the clear teaching of Scripture that Christians are not to just acknowledge a higher standard, but to live to the higher standard. It is a standard of purity and holiness. The standard is convincingly set forth throughout the Word of God.

**1 Peter 1:13-16 - Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."**

**Eph. 5:1 - Therefore be imitators of God as dear children**

These are sobering words: they link us uniquely to God obviously bare serious, Biblical significance. Simply explained, God’s call is that Christians are to be different. Distinguishable from the popular culture in how they think and conduct themselves

**Matt. 5:16 - Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

We are to individually and collectively to be a peculiar people.

**1 Pet. 2:9 - But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.**

Christians are to be non-conformists, not just robots on cruise control.

**Romans 12:1-2 - I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

Let us be content to remain sober, that we may best serve God and be a good example to our fellow man.