
THE CASE FOR TOTAL ABSTINENCE FROM ALCOHOL

QUESTIONS:

- 1) According to some, what is “*social drinking*”?
- 2) What is an “*inceptive verb*”?
- 3) What does alcohol begin to affect on a person?
- 4) What’s the problem with the slogan, “*Know when to say when*”?
- 5) When might a person want to be nervous?
- 6) When 1 Tim 3:8 says Deacons must not be “*given to much wine,*” does this imply a “*little wine*” may be consumed? If so, under what circumstances?
- 7) What is grape juice called in Isa 65:8?
- 8) If Rom 14:21 refers to mere grape juice, how could drinking grape juice cause someone to “*grow weak*” or “*stumble*”?

Introduction

There is a hesitancy on the part of some of our people to condemn all non-medicinal use of alcohol.

The common idea is that ***drunkenness*** is condemned, but not necessarily “***taking a drink.***”

- No one seems to know exactly what constitutes drunkenness.
- No one will say what constitutes “a drink.”

It’s not surprising, then, that we have members of the church who drink.

ILL: I asked one Christian: Why do you believe it's okay to drink alcohol – at least to a limited degree?

To my surprise, no scripture was ever given. Instead, I was referred to several books written by authors who were not Christians and I was told, *“These books make a compelling case that some alcohol may be drunk by a Christian.”*

I was shocked. I thought only scripture could be compelling to a Christian. I suspect we have not only a problem with alcohol, but also with attitudes about authority in religion.

Isalah 8:20

20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

ILL: Another Christian carefully distinguishes between *“social drinking”* and *“taking a drink.”* He teaches that *“social drinking”* is a sin, but he cannot say *“taking a drink”* is a sin.

When I inquired about this unusual position I learned this: *“Social drinking”* means when other people are present. *“Taking a drink”* means all alone in a house with no one present.

- The one (*“social drinking”*) is sinful – implying you will be lost if you do it.
- The other (*“taking a drink”*) is not necessarily sinful.

He wrote the following:

I am adamantly opposed to Christians drinking any form of alcoholic beverages at any time. I have stated to people before, however, that because of the different uses of the word wine in the bible (sometimes alcoholic and sometimes not), and because of the differences in wine made and used in the first century as compared to today, it is difficult to prove from scripture that it is a sin to take a drink.

I always remind people in such contexts of my fierce opposition to a Christian drinking any form of alcohol today because of influence, the fruits of alcohol, wisdom, the exhortation to be sober, etc... (Terry Baze in letter to Ronny Wade, 4/12/06)

I wrote this preacher and accused him of teaching *“social”* drinking. He became very angry because I added the word *“social”* to the equation. Here's what he wrote back:

You say, "I don't see where the misrepresentation has occurred." The misrepresentation is your leap from the sentence, "taking a drink cannot be proven to be sinful" to "it's okay to drink socially." Can you not see that you've added the word "socially?" I have never taught anyone in any context that I believe it to be acceptable for a Christian to drink socially. Whenever a person asks me if it is a sin for a person to take a drink in the privacy of their home, I do not think one can prove from scripture that it is. If you believe that you can, I will gladly look at what you have to say. (Terry Baze in letter to George Battey, 8/15/06)

So this Christian is "adamantly opposed" to "social drinking." He will not tolerate that. But he hesitates to say "taking a drink" is wrong.

THE CASE **FOR ABSTINENCE**

I wish to present to you the case for total abstinence.

I ask you to consider **8 passages** which indicate that "taking a drink" (*even a single drink*) for non-medical purposes is sinful.

In other words, when alcohol is consumed by a Christian:

- **It must be only a measured dose and**
- **It must be for medicinal purposes.**

PASSAGE #1:

1 Peter 4:3-4

3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in lewdness, lusts, **drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties**, and abominable idolatries.

4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

This passage lists things which Christians may have done before conversion, but which they no longer participate in.

Three of these things have to do with drinking alcohol:

Drunkenness (οἴνοφλυγία) – “an overflow or surplus of wine, i.e. vinolence, drunkenness” (Strong's, #3632). This refers to someone who is an alcoholic. They have to have a drink to start the day. They have a drink during the day. They drink in the evening. They drink just before they go to bed. They are addicted.

Revelries (κῶμος) – “revel, carousal ... feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry” (Thayer, 367). This refers to someone who drinks until they become revelrous. They drink at a “Superbowl Party” and get loud and obnoxious.

Drinking parties (πότος) – “a drinking-bout” (Strong's, #4224); “the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium, not of necessity excessive, but giving opportunity for excess” (Trench, Synonyms, p. 225). This refers to someone who simply has a drink at a cocktail party. Since it is listed separately from someone who becomes “tipsy” and also separately from someone who is an addict. It refers to someone who simply has a martini at the end of a day or a glass of wine with supper.

PASSAGE #2:

Luke 12:45-46

45 But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and **begins to** beat the male and female servants, and to eat and **drink and be drunk**,
46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

This passage describes a wicked servant who cares not about the things of his master.

The servant is condemned because:

- He begins to beat servants.
- He begins to drink.
- He becomes drunk.

The problem was not just the final state of drunkenness, but the process involved in becoming drunk.

“Be drunk” (μεθύσκω) – “... to make drunk, or to grow drunk (*an inceptive verb*, marking the process of the state expressed in μεθύω), to become intoxicated, Lk 12:45; Eph 5:18; 1 Th 5:7a.”
(Vine’s Expository Dictionary, 1:341)

NOTE: An *“inceptive verb”* means not just the final state of drunkenness is being condemned, but the process involved.

In other words, the wicked servant is wicked simply because he began to drink alcohol (period)!

If he never got “drunk” (whatever that means), he sinned anyway.

PASSAGE #3:

Ephesians 5:18

18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

This has the same *inceptive verb*.

Literally, “Do not begin to be drunk with wine ...”

“Do not **become** drunk with wine ...”

“Do not **grow** drunk with wine ...”

PASSAGE #4:

1 Thessalonians 5:7

7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

“get drunk are drunk” – this passage not only makes the final state of drunkenness sinful, but the process of getting there is also sinful.

Q: How does one “get drunk”?

A: One “gets drunk” (according to this passage) by drinking alcohol for non-medical purposes.

PASSAGE #5:

Acts 24:25

25 Now as [Paul] reasoned about righteousness, **self-control**, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

“self-control” – this is something a Christian does for himself. The Holy Spirit isn’t going to do this for you. This is why it’s called **self-control**.

The very first drink of alcohol begins to affect one’s ability to make rational judgment.

The Anheuser Busch Company created a slogan: “*Know when to say when.*” The problem is, the more one drinks, the less likely he will know when to stop because his judgment is impaired with each drink he takes.

PASSAGE #6:

1 Corinthians 9:25

25 And everyone who competes for the prize is **temperate in all things**. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

“temperate” (ἐγκρατεύομαι) – is the verb form of “*self-control*” which we saw in Acts 24:25. This means to “*exercise self-restraint*” (Strong’s #1467). Alcohol destroys one’s ability to control himself.

Leviticus 10:9-11

9 “**Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink**, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations,

10 **that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean,**

11 and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses."

Isalah 28:7

7 But they also have erred through wine,
And through intoxicating drink are out of the way;
The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink,
They are swallowed up by wine,
They are out of the way through intoxicating drink;
They err in vision, they stumble in judgment.

These passages teach clearly that alcohol destroys one's ability to distinguish between right and wrong. This has not changed with the changing of the covenants.

It is wrong and illogical to argue about being "**temperate**" in drinking. Temperance, according to the Bible, can be exercised only on things that are lawful.

It's as logical to speak of a "*temperate drinker*" as it is to speak of a "*temperate luster*."

PASSAGE #7:

1 Peter 5:8

8 **Be sober, be vigilant;** because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Every passage in the NT about soberness, vigilance, and temperance is a passage forbidding non-medicinal usage of alcohol.

ILL: Can you imagine being placed in a jungle where you know for a fact a lion is lurking behind the forest growth. You know for a fact the lion is hungry and his intentions are to eat YOU.

Suppose also you have a sword or gun in your hand to defend yourself (cf. Eph 6:17). In all honesty, will you want a drink to "*calm your nerves*" or will you want to stay nervous so your reflexes are as sharp as possible?

As for me, I will want to stay as alert as possible. I want my finger to be on the trigger and I want lightning-fast reflexes so that, when the moment comes, I will be ready to shoot the lion when he bounds toward me. Sobriety is opposed to all recreational (casual) drinking.

PASSAGE #8:

1 Timothy 5:23

23 No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

Timothy was being an example of believers (1 Tim 4:12). He drank "*only water.*"

This passage destroys the oft-repeated but unsubstantiated argument that drinking water in those days was unfit for consumption.

Timothy drank nothing but water (non-intoxicating drink). Paul now instructs him to use a "*little*" wine and it must be only for medicinal purposes.

Q: If Christians were already drinking a little wine non-medicinally, why would Paul need to give these instructions?

ARGUMENTS

Let me now address six common arguments:

ARGUMENT #1: Jesus turned water into wine in Jn 2.

An assumption is being made: *Jesus turned water into alcoholic wine.*

But the Bible uses "*wine*" to mean both fermented and unfermented drink. Only the context can decide which kind of wine is under consideration.

Observe:

Isalah 65:8

8 Thus says the LORD: "As the **new wine is found in the cluster**, And one says, 'Do not destroy it, For a blessing is in it,' So will I do for My servants' sake, That I may not destroy them all.

According to this passage, if I take a cluster of grapes and squeeze them, “new wine” will come out.

Q: What would you and I call this “*new wine*” today?

A: We would call it simply grape juice.

In the Bible 13 words are translated “wine” – (11 Hebrew, 2 Greek). If the word “wine” always meant alcoholic beverage, why use 13 words in the original language?

- “Wine” can mean intoxicating drink.
- “Wine” can mean non-intoxicating drink.

Isalah 16:10

10 Gladness is taken away, And joy from the plentiful field; In the vineyards there will be no singing, Nor will there be shouting; No treaders will tread out **wine in the presses**; I have made their shouting cease.

Jeremiah 48:33

33 Joy and gladness are taken From the plentiful field And from the land of Moab; I have caused **wine to fail from the winepresses**; No one will tread with joyous shouting; Not joyous shouting!

Here it is obvious that “*wine*” refers to non-intoxicating drink.

- When Bible says something good about wine, it is always non-intoxicating.
- When it says something bad, it is fermented.

More passages could be given (Hos 9:2; Mt 21:33), but this is sufficient to prove the point.

I am confident that the Lord Jesus did not convert water into fermented wine and then give it to people at a wedding party to drink. How may I be so confident? Because here is the law Jesus lived under:

Habakkuk 2:15

15 "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, Pressing him to your bottle,
Even to make him drunk, That you may look on his nakedness!

Since Jesus lived under a law that forbade giving alcohol to people that they may be drunk, I am confident Jesus did not make fermented wine in Jn 2.

BTW: Turning water into pure grape juice is just as much of a miracle as turning water into fermented wine.

Some people act like turning water into grape juice would be no miracle at all. I assure you that it is!

ARGUMENT #2: Jesus "ate and drank."

Luke 7:33-35

33 "For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'

34 "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

35 "But wisdom is justified by all her children."

Some think they see here evidence that Jesus drank alcoholic wine. Is this true? NO.

John was a Nazirite from the day of his birth (Lk 1:15).

- A Nazirite was not to eat nor drink anything that was produced from the grapevine.

Numbers 6:3-4

3 'he shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; **neither shall he drink any grape juice**, nor eat **fresh grapes** or raisins.

4 'All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.

Jesus, on the other hand, was not a Nazarite, therefore some accused Him of being a "winebibber and glutton."

"Winebibber" (οἰνοπότης) – "wine drinker, drunkard" (Perschbacher)

NOTE: Jesus was no more a "winebibber" than He was a "glutton." If He was guilty of one, He was guilty of the other. But He was guilty of neither (1 Pet 2:22).

ARGUMENT #3: Deacons are told in 1 Tim 3:8 to "not be GIVEN to much wine." This implies that a little wine may be consumed.

(The following comes from Bonifay's presentation at the Preachers' Study in 2012)

The focus in 1 Tim 3:8 should be on the word "given" which means "addicted." When people are "addicted" (given), naturally it is to "much" of whatever it is they are addicted to.

The superlative "much" does not indicate a "little" is acceptable. Consider the following passages:

1 Peter 4:3-4 (KJV)

3 ... **excess of wine**, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

4 Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same **excess of riot**, speaking evil of you:

Here are both "excess of wine" and "excess of riot." A little wine is no more acceptable than a little riot. Both wine and riot are wrong in any degree.

Ecclesiastes 7:17

17 Do not be overly wicked, ...

Does this passage justify small amounts of wickedness? Of course not.

Conclusion: 1 Tim 3:8 is forbidding addiction to alcohol and does not justify moderate drinking.

ILL: If a parents says, "*Son, I don't want you to use drugs and become an addict.*" Is the son safe in thinking, "*My parents approve of using drugs as long as I don't become an addict.*" Or is the son to conclude, "*My parents don't want me to use drugs recreationally at all*"? This latter conclusion is the proper one.

If someone insists: 1 Tim 3:8 justifies using a little wine, the following question needs to be answered:

Q: Is there a Bible passage which clearly teaches "*a little wine*" may be consumed and if so, for what purpose may "*a little wine*" be used?

1 Timothy 5:23

23 No longer drink only water, but **use a little wine** for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

Clearly the passage in 1 Tim 3:8 harmonizes with this passage.

Christians may indeed use "*a little wine*," but it must be for medicinal purposes only. Otherwise, Christians must drink non-alcoholic drinks only.

ARGUMENT #4: Paul implies wine may be consumed by Christians in Rom 14:21.

Romans 14:21

21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

It is assumed this "*wine*" is fermented, but this must be proven – not assumed.

It has already been demonstrated that "*wine*" can mean only grape juice (cf. Isa 65:8; 16:10; Jer 48:33).

Q: If Rom 14:21 is referring to mere grape juice, how could drinking mere grape juice cause anyone to “stumble” or be “offended” or “made weak”?

A: The same way eating meat could cause someone to sin. In context, this refers to liquid libations (“*drink offerings*”) used in sacrifice to idols.

Deuteronomy 32:37-38

37 [The Lord] will say: 'Where are their gods, The rock in which they sought refuge?

38 Who ate the fat of their sacrifices, And **drank the wine of their drink offering?** Let them rise and help you, And be your refuge.

The point of Rom 14:21 is that if anything used in pagan worship causes someone to get weak:

- I will not even eat meat.
- I will not even drink grape juice.

ARGUMENT #5: “New wine” can mean alcoholic wine.

Acts 2:13

13 Others mocking said, “They are full of new wine.”

The conclusion is foolish.

- Alcoholic wine does not enable men to speak in new languages they never studied. In fact, it slurs the one language they do know.
- “New wine,” (as used in the NT) does not make anyone drunk.

“New wine” (γλεῦκος) – “*sweet new wine*” (Peschbacher); “*must, the sweet juice pressed from the grape; sweet wine*” (Thayer, p. 118)

Judges 9:13

13 But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my **new wine**, Which cheers both God and men, And go to sway over trees?'

Proverbs 3:10

10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with **new wine**.

Isalah 65:8

8 Thus says the LORD: "As the **new wine is found in the cluster**, And one says, 'Do not destroy it, For a blessing is in it,' So will I do for My servants' sake, That I may not destroy them all.

"*New wine*" is simply grape juice.

ARGUMENT #6: Wine must be used in communion - therefore it's acceptable for a Christian to drink a little alcohol.

Fermented wine was not used in the communion – according to the Bible. Nor does any passage ever say Jesus used fermented wine. In fact, the word "*wine*" is never used in any passage discussing the Lord's supper. The expression is always "*fruit of the vine*."

Think about this carefully: ***Jesus instituted the Lord's supper*** (communion) ***during the Jewish Passover***. Notice:

Matthew 26:17-18

17 Now on the first day of **the Feast of the Unleavened Bread** the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat **the Passover**?"

18 And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep **the Passover** at your house with My disciples.'""

Q: When God's people ate the Passover and observed the "*Feast of Unleavened Bread*," what were the rules?

A: The rules explicitly stated all leaven had to be removed from the house.

Exodus 12:19-20

19 For seven days **no leaven shall be found in your houses**, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land.

20 You shall **eat nothing leavened**; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread."

Did you hear that? Nothing leavened shall be eaten during the feast.

Q: Do you know what fermented wine is?

A: It is "leavened" grape juice.

We can know for a fact that no fermented wine was used when Jesus instituted the Lord's supper (communion).

NOTE: I am discussing what the Bible says. I am not discussing what Jews today do.

If you want to know what Jews do today, then go ask a Jew. But if you want to know what the Bible says about Passover, then forget about asking a Jew and open up your Bible.

Let's face it: ***The Jews rejected their own law and their own Savior.*** Looking to them to discover how to observe Passover is unreasonable. Jesus said they do many things contrary to the law of God (Mt 15:9).

Passover, in the Bible, actually had no drink element whatsoever prescribed – and it certainly did not authorize the consumption of leavened wine.

Jesus used grape juice:

Matthew 26:29

29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this **fruit of the vine** from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

"fruit of the vine" – fruit which is produced on the vine.

Q: What does the vine produce? Fermented wine or grape juice?

A: There is no vine on earth which ever produced fermented wine. The vine produces grape juice and that is what Jesus used.

SUMMARY

No NT passage allows the use of alcohol for recreational purposes. Only a small amount may be taken medicinally.

Romans 13:13

13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

The same prohibition placed on revelry and lewdness is also placed on drunkenness.

- May we revel moderately?
- May we lust and be lewd moderately?

Again: The condemnation of excess does not mean moderation is allowed.

CONCLUSION

Q: Is taking a single, non-medicinal drink of alcohol a sin?

A: Absolutely.

I have worked with alcoholics and drug addicts through the years to know the folly of "*moderate usage.*" It does not work.

If a leader in the church holds to the *“moderate usage”* position on drugs or alcohol, that leader will eventually find he has encouraged one to stumble into sin – something strictly forbidden (1 Cor 8:13).

Matthew 18:6-7

6 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!