

DRINKING ALCOHOL IS NOT A SIN

THERE ARE MANY CHURCHES throughout the United States that do not allow their members to drink alcoholic beverages. This prohibition is so strong that it is actually a part of many church covenants. This covenant doesn't mention sins like murder, rape, fornication, or drug abuse, but it does mention alcohol. This leads me to believe that the modern church thinks that drinking alcohol is one of the most serious sins that a person can commit. After all, if you truly believed that sexual immorality was worse than drinking alcohol then why would you mention alcohol but not even say a word about adultery? Isn't it far more likely that you mentioned the things you really cared about, and didn't mention the others because you're not really concerned about them?

Given that context, you may be surprised to learn that this verse is a real, genuine Bible verse:

Deuteronomy 14:26: “And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,”

You can look up this verse in other translations if you like, but there's no getting around the fact that "strong drink" means exactly that. This verse is not talking about grape juice. It really does say that it is a good thing for people to drink alcoholic beverages before the Lord and rejoice.

If you read the previous chapter's discussion about tithing then that verse should already be familiar to you. Deuteronomy 14 says that God would appoint a place where the Israelites were to bring their tithes. However, if that place was too far away then the Israelites were commanded to spend their tithe on whatever they wanted (be it oxen or wine) and eat it before the Lord and rejoice. If they wanted to spend it on strong drink then they could do that.

It may surprise you to learn that the Mosaic Law, with its hundreds of regulations, did *not* prohibit the consumption of alcohol. What it does prohibit is drunkenness, which is entirely different. Under the Mosaic Law you were allowed to drink alcohol, but you were *not* allowed to abuse it and get drunk. It was the *abuse* of alcohol that was outlawed. The Bible warns against drunkenness:

Proverbs 23:21: "For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

Proverbs 20:1: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

Proverbs 23:29: "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?
30 They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.

31 Look not thou upon the wine when it is red,
when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it
moveth itself aright.

32 At the last it biteth like a serpent, and
stingeth like an adder.

33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and
thine heart shall utter perverse things.

34 Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the
midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top
of a mast.

35 They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I
was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it
not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."

Yet this is *not* a complete prohibition on drinking. The
book of Proverbs also says this:

Proverbs 31:6: "Give strong drink unto him
that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that
be of heavy hearts.

7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and
remember his misery no more."

The problem is that we have taken God's commandment
too far. Because drunkenness is such a terrible thing, we have
gone beyond the law of God and outlawed drinking altogether.
That is a lot like saying that since rape exists, all men should be
celibate. It is entirely possible to drink alcohol *without* abusing it.
Don't just take my word for it, though. Take a look at what the
Bible has to say:

Ecclesiastes 2:3: "I sought in mine heart to give
myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart
with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might
see what was that good for the sons of men,

which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.”

Solomon drank wine *without* losing his wisdom. It really *is* possible to drink moderately. Saying “No one should drink because some people get drunk” is going far beyond what the Bible teaches.

Some people say “Well, it's really best for Christians to avoid drinking altogether.” These people might be surprised to learn that Jesus did not follow that advice. Christ Himself told us that He drank alcohol:

Matthew 11:18: “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.
19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”

In this passage Jesus is criticizing His generation for their quarrelsome nature. When John the Baptist abstained from alcohol they accused him of being demon-possessed. When Jesus *did not* abstain from alcohol they accused him of being a drunkard. They were determined to find fault no matter what the situation.

The point that I want to bring out is that the Son of Man came *eating and drinking*. In the context of the passage it is obvious that Jesus drank alcoholic beverages. I realize there are some people who look at this passage and try to force it to say “John did not drink and Jesus did not drink either”, but that ruins the contrast that Jesus was trying to draw. The whole point of these verses is that Jesus behaved differently from John. If neither of them drank then there is no contrast and the passage becomes meaningless.

Are there dangers involved with drinking alcohol? Absolutely. Are there people who should avoid alcohol because they have either abused it in the past or because they might be tempted by it? Yes there are.

My point is *not* that people should drink alcohol. What I am saying is that we need to be honest about what the Bible actually teaches. It is foolish to claim that the Bible completely prohibits all alcohol consumption regardless of the quantity or situation; it simply *does not say that*. There is wisdom in choosing to abstain from alcohol – but all drinking is not a sin.

