

Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century

The Challenge of Alcohol and Drugs: How the culture sees enjoyment

Intro: In our culture the consumption of alcohol is closely tied to times of personal enjoyment, either as one is relaxing at home or more especially with friends.

The typical message about alcohol is that it promotes relaxation and enhances enjoyment of social gatherings.

In some contexts it suggests that the use is a sophisticated person who appreciates the use of wine for example as part of a “fine dining experience.”

Over \$2 billion per year is spent by advertisers promoting alcohol use.

All these messages impress upon young people that drinking alcohol is a good thing.

Researchers at Rand Corp., the non-partisan research firm, designed a study where 589 kids aged 11-14 used handheld computers to log the number of times a day they saw an ad for alcohol. The team determined the kids in the study were exposed to an average of about three alcohol-related advertisements a day. (<http://www.cnbc.com/2016/05/18/american-kids-see-about-3-ads-for-alcohol-each-day-rand-study.html>) That works out to over a thousand messages a year in which young people are either directly or subliminally encouraged to see alcohol in a positive light.

What is more troublesome is the fact that many religious leaders encourage the use of alcohol and social drinking, often using the Bible to justify the practice. Not surprising, social drinking is becoming more common among Christians as well.

In addition we have witnessed the increasing approval for the recreational use of drugs like marijuana with many states now legalizing its sale.

The Social Costs of Social Drinking: A Needed Reality Check!

Our society (and many Christians who live in it) desperately need a reality check and a wake-up call on the issue of drinking alcohol. It is a much bigger problem than just the problem of drinking and driving. Here are some sobering facts!

Drunk driving is a serious alcohol-related problem.

Over 10,000 deaths per year in the U.S. are related to drinking and driving. Every 90 seconds someone is injured in a drunk driving crash. The NHTSA (1999) estimated that 4 million people are victimized each year by 2.6 million drunk driving crashes. Not every victim is killed, but many are injured, maimed or disfigured! The cost of drunk driving crashes in American is \$130 billion annually.

Nearly 40% of prison inmates serving time for a violent offense say that they were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offense. Serious effects on home and personal life. Alcohol use is often a factor in domestic violence, breakup of families, misspent paychecks, risky sexual behavior, unintended pregnancy, and job loss.

People are often given the impression that alcohol is really good for you; but in reality it has serious health risks including damage to the brain, liver, pancreas; the immune system. There is still debate over whether it is the alcohol or a substance in the skin of the grape that has the beneficial effect.

A Biblical Response to today's alcohol culture

Several years ago now (2004) I presented a lengthy series of lessons on the Christian and the use of alcoholic beverages. I gave detailed evidence on wine in the biblical culture (how it was produced and preserved in the ancient world). I documented from numerous ancient sources among both Jews and Greeks that biblical references to wine refer to a mixture of wine and water (the wine being diluted based on its strength) to reduce its intoxicating power. But with that background in mind I want to explore why I believe Christians should refrain from the use of alcoholic beverages commonly available and used today.

We must recognize the great difference between the wine of the Biblical context and the wine of our modern world.

Justifying consumption of modern wines and spirits on the basis of the OT and NT consumption of wine and strong drink is not comparing apples with apples). In fact, there is a stark contrast between what God approved in the ancient world and what people today are doing. It's more like comparing grapes with grapefruit!

Ancient wines were commonly mixed with water, reducing the likelihood of intoxication. They would not cause intoxication in the form they were used without drinking large amounts.

Thus the quantitative statements of Scripture like "not given to much wine" or "use a little wine." Today wine and other alcoholic drinks are served unmixed, full strength.

Ancient wines might have had alcoholic content from 5-6%; its dilution ratio with water was based on its strength; the stronger the drink, the more it was diluted. The result would be a beverage with low alcoholic content (1-4%). Modern wines have an alcoholic content far greater and produce intoxication much quicker.

The alcohol content of a wine can range from a low of about 7% in a light German Riesling to about 17% in a monster late harvest Zinfandel. Fortified wines can go up to 21%. Most wines, however, have between 11% and 14%. (www.wine.com)

Brandy, Gin, Vodka, Whiskey—40-50% alcohol

In fact in New Testament times, one would need to drink twenty-two glasses of wine in order to consume the large amount of alcohol in two martinis today.

Robert Stein humorously notes, "In other words, it is possible to become intoxicated from wine mixed with

three parts water, but one's drinking would probably affect the bladder long before the mind."

Ancient people had very limited choices in beverages. (Water was often impure and wine was often used to purify it). Preservation of other juices was quite difficult due to the lack of refrigeration and the time and cost of processing and preserving juices. Today there are abundant choices of beverages, including pure water, teas, soft drinks, and juices, all of which can be drunk without addiction or questionable influence.

When people today drink unmixed highly alcoholic wine and then use the Bible for justification, they are misusing the Bible! It is not a fair or logical comparison. A glass of unmixed wine today could have as much as 10 times the potency of a glass of mixed wine drunk in the Biblical culture!

We need to pay serious attention to the warnings concerning the dangers of wine and strong drink.

Solomon warned of the dangers of wine consumption and its effects on behavior when intoxicated.

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise. (Proverbs 20:1)

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. (Proverbs 23:29-30)

Those warnings urge the reader to consider the effects that drinking larger amounts of wine and strong drink can have on the drinker. The dangers of drinking wine in excess results in:

Slowing of the thinking processes (Prov 31:4-5; Isa 28:7; Hos 4:11);

Stupor (Jer 25:27; 51:39);

Sickness (Isa 19:14; 28:7-8 ; Jer 48:26);

Staggering (loss of balance and mental control) (Job 12:25; Isa 28:7-8; 29:9);

Arrogance (Hab 2:5);

Forgetfulness (Prov 31:6-7);

Confusion and delirious dreams (Prov 23:31, 33);

sleepiness (Gen 9:20-24; 19:33);

Lack of feeling (Prov 23:31, 35);

Bloodshot eyes (Prov 23:29-30);

Poverty (Prov 23:20-21).

The dangers of drinking wine are particularly acute to those who must serve in responsible positions. Sobriety was of utmost importance. Hence wine was forbidden to:

Those who were dedicated to God in a Nazarite vow.

he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh or dried grapes.

(Numbers 6:3)

Those who were serving God in the tabernacle (Lev. 10).

“Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you may not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations— (Leviticus 10:9)

Rulers are warned of the dangers of drinking while they exercise their rule.

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink, lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. (Proverbs 31:4-5)

Though these effects could be achieved by drinking relatively large amounts of the mixed Biblical wines, in this society they can be achieved by drinking relatively small amounts of the powerful wines and liquors commonly available for consumption.

If God warned of the dangers of drinking those beverages, would not those warnings be amplified when one is using a beverage that is far more potent?

We need to recognize what the Bible explicitly condemns and make no provision for it!

The Bible explicitly condemns drunkenness

But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:11)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:21)

As we read these passages about drunkenness we need to remember that it is a process not an event. Most people who drink will realize afterward that they drank too much.

The Bible explicitly condemns participation in carousing and drinking parties.

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; (1 Peter 4:3-4)

Let's focus on some of the key terms::

Drunkenness translates "oinophlugia" which expresses the idea of extreme drunkenness, a debauch.

Carousing translates "komos": m: drinking parties involving unrestrained indulgence in alcoholic beverages and accompanying immoral behavior - 'orgy, revelling, carousing.'

Trench distinguishes "komos" as combining the concepts of "riot and revelry".

Trench in his "Synonyms of the NT" indicates that "potos" refers to "the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium, not of necessity excessive, but giving opportunity for excess.

Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:13-14)

We need to appreciate the importance of sobriety and self-control.

"Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." (1 Corinthians 16:13)

"so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober." (1 Thessalonians 5:6)

We need to pay careful attention to the effect of our example on others, especially young people, those with weak consciences, and the world about us.

Before a person decides to drink or to continue drinking, he should be fully aware of the facts we cited earlier about the dangers and problems associated with drinking alcohol.

Public advocating of "responsible drinking" can easily be taken as permission to freely use alcoholic beverages with catastrophic results to the young.

Young people often do not have the maturity to know the inherent dangers of alcohol consumption and may take the advocating of drinking as permission to freely use alcohol resulting in misuse, addiction, and drunkenness.

"And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. (Mark 9:42)

A good question for all adults to consider is, “How can we consistently condemn the recreational use of drugs among the young like marijuana while maintaining the right to drink what produces the same effect?”

Paul affirmed that even Christian liberties must not become a means to hurt a brother or sister in Christ.

It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. (Romans 14:21)

How then should the Christian respond to the alcoholic culture in which we live?

It must be borne in mind that the drink question is far more complex and acute in modern than in Biblical times, and that the conditions of the modern world have given rise to problems which were not within the horizon of New Testament writers. The habit of excessive drinking has spread enormously among the common people, owing largely to the cheapening of alcoholic drinks. The fact that the evil exists today in greater proportions may call for a drastic remedy and a special crusade. But rather than defend total abstinence by a false or forced exegesis, it were better to admit that the principle is not formally laid down in the New Testament, while maintaining that there are broad principles enunciated, which in view of modern conditions should lead to voluntary abstinence from all intoxicants. Such principles may be found, e. g. in our Lord's teaching in Matthew 16:24; Mark 9:42, and in the great Pauline passages--Romans 14:13-21; 1 Corinthians 8:8-13. (ISBE)

Conclusions: I've never been drunk but once in my life. When I was about five years old I, along with a friend of mine were exploring in the back yard and discovered some Jimson weed. I cut them open and got the juice on my hands and apparently into my system. A few hours later I was wild. I never knew what hit me; but my parents tell me that I was quite out of it. I don't remember a thing!

I hope to never be drunk again from any source. I want to make sure that I do not lose control of my thoughts and consequently do something that I would regret for life. Consequently I am committed to never using any substance in any amount that would put me at risk of losing personal control over my actions.

I want to always live by the principle of love. For me, that means that I would carefully avoid any practice that might hurt others, that might lead them to do something that would hurt themselves. I urge you to do the same.