

Concerning Intoxicants

I. Definitions.

- A. intoxicant: An intoxicating substance or liquor.
- B. intoxicate: *trans.* To poison. *Obs.* 2. To stupefy, render unconscious or delirious, to madden or deprive of the ordinary use of the senses or reason, with a drug or alcoholic liquor; to inebriate, make drunk.
- C. stupefy: *trans.* To make stupid or torpid; to deprive of apprehension, feeling, or sensibility; to benumb, deaden.
- D. torpid: Benumbed; deprived or devoid of the power of motion or feeling; in which activity, animation, or development is suspended; dormant.
- E. delirious: Affected with delirium, *esp.* as a result or symptom of disease; wandering in mind, light-headed, temporarily insane.
- F. drunk: That has drunk intoxicating liquor to an extent which affects steady self-control; intoxicated, inebriated; overcome by alcoholic liquor.
- G. wine: The fermented juice of the grape used as a beverage.
- H. fermentation: A process of the nature of that resulting from the operation of leaven on dough or on saccharine (sugary) liquids.
- I. strong drink: Intoxicating liquor, alcoholic liquors generally. Also, drink of more than ordinary alcoholic strength.
- J. liquor: Liquid for drinking; beverage, drink. Now almost exclusively spec., a drink produced by fermentation or distillation. ***malt liquor***, liquor brewed from malt; ale, beer, porter, etc. ***spirituous liquor***, liquor produced by distillation; spirits. ***vinous liquor***, liquor made from grapes; wine.

II. This study will primarily address alcoholic beverages.

- A. Scripture declares such beverages to be permissible but with qualifications.
- B. Here are eight areas of concern as touching alcohol:
 - 1. Drunkenness, which is plainly forbidden. **GAL 5:21.**
 - 2. Addiction (which may not involve drunkenness).
 - 3. Its preference over things of higher value (e.g. a healthy baby).
 - 4. When it is a substitute savior upon which one relies (it becomes a crutch).
 - 5. When it causes a weaker person to stumble or hinders conversion.
 - 6. Negative health implications for oneself.
 - 7. When it violates one's conscience.
 - 8. Its potential to impair discernment and break down good inhibitions.
- C. That which is permissible is not a necessity. One can live without it physically and morally/spiritually (with one exception: communion).
- D. Alcohol, like fire, may be a good servant but an awful master. A servant which rules is an unbearable thing in the earth. **PRO 30:21-22.**

III. There are basically five terms in Scripture which relate to beverages with intoxicating effects: *wine*, *new wine*, *sweet wine*, *strong wine* and *strong drink*. Here are some basic facts about wine and strong drink:

- A. Wine is not grape juice. Grape juice is not fermented.
- B. The fermentation process is what produces the alcohol in wine that causes exhilaration when consumed and intoxication when consumed excessively.
- C. Wine is the natural product of grapes.
- D. Grapes contain roughly 80% water and 15% sugar by weight in their natural state.

- E. The skin of the grape is covered with microscopic fungus that provides natural yeasts.
- F. When crushed, the yeast and sugar combine to form alcohol.
- G. When the alcohol of the mixture reaches about 14%, it kills the remaining yeast, thus stopping fermentation.
- H. Extra steps must be taken to either avoid fermentation or to increase it above 14%.
- I. Wine generally has between 5% and 15% alcohol.
- J. Beer generally has between 2% and 6% alcohol.
- K. Distilled drinks such as whiskey, rum, gin and vodka generally have much higher alcoholic content, 40% and higher.

IV. Scripture does not outrightly condemn all use of wine or strong drink.

- A. Wine was given for the uplifting of man's heart. **JDG 9:13; PSA 104:14-15; PRO 31:6-7.**
- B. Wine and strong drink have certain medicinal properties that Scripture notes. **PSA 104:14-15 c/w PRO 17:22; LUK 10:34; 1TI 5:23.**
- C. Abraham and Melchizedek shared wine. **GEN 14:18.**
- D. God expressly told Israel to use both and enjoy. **DEU 14:26.**
- E. The gospel is compared to free wine. **ISA 55:1.**
- F. Jesus turned water into wine. **JOH 2:1-11.**
- G. Jesus drank wine which was obviously an intoxicant. **LUK 7:33-34.**
- H. Wine is used for communion. **MAT 26:29 c/w 1CO 11:21.**
 - 1. Paul corrects the misuse or abuse of the beverage of communion, not the use of it.
 - 2. Wine is unleavened by virtue of the fermentation process which kills the yeast.
 - 3. Wine has cleansing, healing and preserving properties, as does the blood of Christ. This could not be said for grape juice.
 - 4. The symbolism of wine for blood is justified by these verses: **GEN 49:11; ISA 49:26; REV 17:6.**
- I. Obviously, allowance is made for the consumption of alcoholic beverages, but the rule is moderation. **EPH 5:18; PHIL 4:5.**
 - 1. Paul told the bishop, Timothy, to use *a little*. **1TI 5:23.**
 - 2. Bishops should not be *given to wine*. **TIT 1:7.**
 - 3. Deacons likewise may consume some wine. **1TI 3:8.**
 - 4. Aged women may use some. **TIT 2:3.**
 - 5. Others not in these categories could use more in moderation.
 - 6. Caution is needed because of the deceptive nature of alcoholic spirits (**PRO 20:1**) and the varying degrees of tolerance of different people.

V. The most popular argument for total abstinence is that “wine” in the Scripture may mean two different things. If it is *condemned*, then it is fermented wine. If it is *commended*, then it is unfermented wine. This is circular reasoning.

- A. Every Scriptural context describing wine or its effects is always an alcoholic beverage. Examples:
 - 1. Noah planted a vineyard and became drunken. **GEN 9:21.**
 - 2. Lot became drunk with wine from his daughters. **GEN 19:32-35.**
 - 3. Eli assumed Hannah was drunken from wine. **1SAM 1:14.**
- B. Some would argue that “new wine” is not truly wine, but see: **HOS 4:11; JOEL 1:5; ACT 2:13-15.**
 - 1. *New wine* generally just means wine of current or recent vintage.
 - 2. Old wine is of a more distant vintage and so generally preferred. **LUK 5:39.**
- C. Some would make similar arguments for “sweet wine.” **ISA 49:26.**

1. Obviously, one can be drunken with sweet wine.
2. Some wines by nature have a sweeter taste, others by fortification (e.g. Port).

VI. Different verses are proffered in support of total abstinence. Here are some:

A. **LEV 10:9.**

1. This verse was for Aaron and his sons only in the performance of the tabernacle service. c/w **EZE 44:21**.
2. The priests otherwise drank the best wine. **NUM 18:12; DEU 18:3-4**.
3. If the restrictions upon the priests are the measure of our conduct, then we must also be bound by the things in **EZE 44:17, 22**.

B. **NUM 6:2-3.**

1. This abstinence was only for the Nazarites for the duration of their vow. They could drink wine after the vow. **v. 20**.
2. These verses actually prove that the normal diet of the people included wine.
3. If these verses dictate our abstinence from wine, they would also censure grapes, grape juice, raisins, haircuts and funerals. **vs. 3-7**.
4. The Lord Jesus Christ was not even under such a vow. **LUK 7:33-34**.

C. **DEU 29:5-6.**

1. This was a temporary abstinence while Israel had manna in the wilderness. It was to prove the superior merits of spiritual things to carnal pleasures. **DEU 8:3**.
2. Upon entering Canaan, God would provide them with ready vineyards and a blessing upon their wine if obedient. **DEU 6:10-12; 7:13**.
3. If these verses forbid wine, they would also forbid bread.
4. This errant reasoning would also forbid ownership of a home or property since God also withheld those from Israel during their wandering.
5. Obviously, God temporarily denied Israel what would be otherwise normal.

D. **PRO 20:1.**

1. Wine and strong drink do not of themselves mock or rage. It is the abuse of wine and strong drink that causes mocking or rage.
2. God has here employed a figure of speech for association known as a metonym of cause for effect. See also **PRO 29:15; JAM 3:6**.

E. **PRO 23:31.**

1. This verse doesn't stop at censuring consumption. Strictly construed, it condemns LOOKING at wine (but only red wine moving in a cup). White wine might be OK.
2. If the grammar of this verse somehow proves abstinence, similar grammar would forbid us from doing just about anything. **2CO 4:18; PHIL 2:4**.
3. The context of **PRO 23:31** is obviously a warning against over-indulgence of wine to the point of drunkenness.

F. **PRO 31:4.**

1. This is a warning to govern a king's conduct.
 - a. Rules for the king may not necessarily apply to everyone else.
 - b. Kings were forbidden to multiply unto themselves horses (**DEU 17:16**), but would that forbid someone else from operating a mustang ranch?
2. If kings are bound by total abstinence, why did Melchizedek and Jesus drink wine?
3. Obviously this is a warning to kings to exercise caution lest their indulgence lead to the perversion of justice. **v. 5**.

G. **DAN 1:8.**

1. This was something that Daniel purposed in his heart.
2. He may also have been avoiding pollutions of idols. **DEU 32:37-38**.

3. If this verse forbids consumption of wine, it also forbids consumption of food.
 4. Daniel later drank wine. **DAN 10:3.**
 - H. **HAB 2:15.**
 1. The crime here censured is not giving an intoxicant, but doing so for immoral purposes.
 2. Melchizedek gave Abraham wine. **GEN 14:18.**
 3. Jesus created much wine (108-160 gallons). **JOH 2:1-11.**
 - I. **ROM 14:21.**
 1. If this verse condemns drinking wine, so too with eating meat.
 2. The context is dealing with the proper emphasis of church fellowship and the need to be cautious to not flaunt personal liberties. **vs. 17, 22.**
 - J. **TIT 1:7.**
 1. This verse does not condemn moderation, but addiction.
 2. Bishops are also not to be given to filthy lucre. Would this forbid us from having or using money?
- VII. Faulty use of Scripture to advance required abstinence should remind us of the warnings against Pharisaism. **MAT 16:12.**
- A. Pharisaism tends to magnify lesser things to the disregard of important things. **MAT 23:23-24.**
 - B. Pharisaism stresses outward shows of righteousness to the disregard of inward purity. **MAT 23:25-28.**
 - C. Pharisaism is unwilling to conform to God's standard of righteousness and therefore substitutes artificial standards. **MAR 7:1-9.**
 1. These man-made traditions are worthless forms of worship. **v. 7.**
 2. These man-made traditions negate Biblical influence. **v. 13.**
 - D. Pharisaism believes that things from without the body, like diet or drink, are true measures of morality and spirituality. **COL 2:20-23 ct/w ROM 14:17.**
- VIII. Over against the extreme of required abstinence is the extreme of excessive and abusive use of alcohol. Beware the extremes, as we tend to react to one excess by recoiling to the opposite. Like a pendulum, our profitable motions are not at the static points but in between.
- A. Drunkenness is sin and constitutes grounds for church exclusion. **1CO 5:11; 6:10; GAL 5:21.**
 1. drunk: That has drunk intoxicating liquor to an extent which affects steady self-control; intoxicated, inebriated; overcome by alcoholic liquor.
 2. intoxication: The action of poisoning; administration of poison; killing by poison; the state of being poisoned; an instance of this. *Obs. exc. Med.* 2. The action of rendering stupid, insensible or disordered in intellect, with a drug or alcoholic liquor; making drunk or inebriated; the condition of being so stupefied.
 - B. Drunkenness is characterized by or associated with:
 1. babbling speech. **1SAM 1:12-16; PRO 23:29; ACT 2:4-15.**
 2. involuntary and/or immoral nakedness. **GEN 9:20-24; 19:30-36; LAM 4:21; HAB 2:15.**
 3. staggering and falling. **JOB 12:25; PSA 107:27; JER 25:27.**
 4. loss of judgment and godly inhibitions. **PRO 23:33; 31:4-5; ISA 28:7.**
 5. foolish conduct. **PRO 20:1; 23:29, 33; PSA 69:12.**
 6. vomiting and loss of feeling. **PRO 23:34-35; ISA 19:14; JER 23:9.**
 7. excessive and frequent consumption. **PRO 23:30; ISA 5:11; EPH 5:18.**

8. addiction. **PRO 23:35.**
- C. Drunkenness is not necessarily beyond consciousness.
 1. Many drunk drivers are conscious when arrested.
 2. Something to ponder: if you have drunk enough to be arrested for a DWI/DUI but you don't drive, does not getting behind the wheel make you not drunk?
- D. Drunkenness tends to personal poverty. **PRO 21:17; 23:21.**
 1. It can tend to personal poverty when one cannot hold a job because of alcoholism, being fired for drunkenness, loss of faculty or ambition for work, etc.
 2. It can tend to personal poverty by pregnancy or injury.
 3. It certainly tends to personal poverty when one's drunkenness causes civil or criminal liability, legal expenses, loss of driving privileges, loss of job, jail time, etc.
- E. Contrary to the state of drunkenness which is characterized by yielding control of faculties to the intoxicating effects of alcohol, Christians should be in control of their senses. **1CO 9:27; 1PE 1:13.**
- F. Christians should be characterized by sobriety and temperance. **1CO 9:25; 1TH 5:6-8.**
 1. temperate: Of persons, their conduct, practices, etc.: Keeping due measure, self-restrained, moderate... b. Moderate and self-controlled as regards the indulgence of appetites or desires; abstemious, sober; continent; in late use spec. moderate or abstemious in the use of alcoholic drinks.
 2. Remember that temperance applies to food and drink. **PRO 23:20-21.**
- G. Christians also need to avoid undue or compromising identification with the unfettered lifestyle. **PSA 1:1; PRO 23:20; GAL 5:21; 1PE 4:3-4; 1CO 15:33.**
 1. riotous: Of persons: Given to wantonness, revelry, or dissolute life; prodigal, extravagant.
 2. revelling: Riotous or disorderly merry-making or festivity; a revel.
 3. Wild festivals, "raves" or "clubbing" should be avoided.
 4. Do not be deceived by the world's definition of "the good life." **1PE 3:10-11.**
 5. There is hope for the repentant reveler. **LUK 15:13, 18-20.**
- H. Alcoholic drinks are sometimes mixed. But there are some things that alcohol does not mix well with:
 1. chastity. Never underestimate the power of alcohol to corrupt your purity.
 2. driving.
 3. guns and other dangers.
 4. reputation. Drunk men's words are sober men's thoughts.
 5. judgment. **ISA 5:22-23.**
 6. worship. **LEV 10:9 c/w 1CO 11:21-22.**
- IX. Another concern with alcohol is its addictive properties.
 - A. In its advanced abuse, it follows the known addictive cycle of exhilaration, depression, regret, repetition.
 - B. But we are to not be given over to anything that gains mastery over us other than the will of God and genuine love for one another. **PSA 119:112; ROM 12:13; 1CO 16:15.**
 - C. We are called to freedom, not bondage. **GAL 5:1.**
 - D. There is no substitute for God's saving power and pleasure. **PSA 16:8-11.**
- X. The sins and warnings of alcohol may be roughly paralleled with other intoxicants under the clause "and such like" (**GAL 5:21**).
 - A. This could include illegal drugs (which add an element of criminality).

- B. This could include legalized drugs like marijuana.
- C. This could include prescription medications that become addictions or are improperly used for “recreational” purposes.

XI. Christians have liberty in areas where God has not spoken. **ROM 4:15.**

- A. But Christian liberty must not be abused. **GAL 5:13; 1PE 2:16.**
- B. Scripture allows for the moderate use of alcohol, but condemns drunkenness and warns about its deceitful characteristics.
- C. Christian liberty should:
 1. not provide temptation. If a person can't control his drinking, he should avoid it. **ROM 13:14.**
 2. not bring someone under the mastery of alcohol. **1CO 6:12.**
 3. not cause arrogance. **1CO 8:1.**
 4. appreciated but not flaunted. **ROM 14:22.**
 5. be used confidently. **ROM 14:23.**
 6. consider the welfare of others. **ROM 14:13, 21; 1CO 13:5.**
 7. not be worried about offending stubborn Pharisees. **LUK 7:31-35.**
 8. acknowledge that abstinence is allowed. **JER 35.**
 9. allow moderate drinking or abstinence while condemning drunkenness, addictions, perverse judgment, violations of conscience, psycho-crutches and heresies.