

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Be Not Drunk with Wine, Part 3

Scripture: Ephesians 5:18

Code: 1938

REVIEW

The Christian's Wine List

Question #1: Is drinking wine today the same as in Bible times?

Question #2: Is drinking wine necessary?

LESSON

Question #3: Is drinking wine the best choice?

The Christian is constantly faced with choices. The Bible doesn't speak directly against someone who chooses to place leaves in his mouth and light them on fire--smoke--but that doesn't make it the best choice for the believer. A Christian has the option to drink coffee, but many abstain because of its negative effects on the body. The same is true for drinking wine. A Christian has the liberty to drink it, but is it the best choice?

A. The Separation

God called His people Israel to separate themselves from evil. There were higher standards for those with greater leadership responsibilities. With the higher rank came greater consequences and guilt for sin. James 3:1 says, "Be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgement." Likewise, Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much shall much be required" (Luke 12:48, NASB). When you sin as a leader in the church, the ramifications of that sin are far-reaching.

B. The Standard

1. The higher standard for Old Testament priests

God established standards for His people, but He called certain men to live above even those standards. Leviticus 10:9 gives this standard for priests: "Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die." Some Bible commentators think this command applied only when the priests ministered inside the tabernacle.

Others believe the command applied to their entire lives. But either way the priests were called to minister for God and abstain from alcohol. The reason was their judgment could be clouded and God wanted their minds clean, clear, and pure.

2. The higher standard for kings and princes

Proverbs 31:4-5 says, "It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink, lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the justice of any of the afflicted." God didn't want their judgment, like the priests, to be clouded. According to verse 6, strong drink was given only to those who were perishing. It was a sedative for their pain. Regular wine was given to those who were heavy of heart. There was to be a greater level of consecration in the leadership of the country.

3. The higher standard for those taking the Nazirite vow

Numbers 6:1-5 says, "The Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate themselves unto the Lord; he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink and liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head."

a
) The choice

Certain people in the congregation of Israel chose to abstain from alcohol. Anyone could choose the higher standard of the Nazirite vow.

b
) The consecration

The word Nazirite comes from the Hebrew word nazir, which means "the consecrated one." A Nazirite then was someone who was wholly dedicated to the Lord.

c
) The character

The person taking the Nazirite vow would no longer cut his hair or drink any wine. The highest level of consecration involved total abstinence. Someone who took a Nazirite vow was stepping up to a higher level of commitment and thus identifying with kings, princes, and priests. A Nazirite vow could last for thirty, sixty, ninety days--or even for life.

There are three people mentioned in the Bible who were Nazirites for life: Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11, 22), Samson (Jud. 13:4-7), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15). Jesus Himself called John the Baptist the greatest man who ever lived up to his time (Matt. 11:11).

d) The count

Anyone in Israel who wanted to could take the Nazirite vow. It is unknown exactly how many Nazirites there were in Israel but is likely there were many. God said, "I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel?" (Amos 2:11). God was saying He raised up prophets and Nazirites for a higher standard of life among the people.

e) The corruption

Although God raised up men and women to take the Nazirite vow, many in Israel began to corrupt them. Amos goes on to say, "But ye gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophesy not" (v. 12). They desecrated the Nazirites and the prophets. The Nazirites were enticed into disobedience by the people. Instead of wanting to attain to the highest level of devotion, the people wanted to drag those who were to the lowest level in their society.

f) The contrast

Jeremiah contrasts the disobedience of Israel with the obedience of the Rechabite family (cf. Jer. 35:2-6). The Rechabites said, "We will drink no wine; for Jonadab, the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons forever" (v. 6). The entire family took a vow of total abstinence from wine. They desired the highest level of devotion to God and when God put bowls of wine in front of them, they refused to drink. They remained strong in their commitment to the Lord.

4. The higher standard for New Testament Church leaders

The New Testament presents little change in God's standard for leadership. Peter said, "Ye [believers] are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a people of his own, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). All Christians have been called to the highest level of service God and are expected to make the best choices.

a

) The leadership in general

Since the priests, Nazirites, kings, judges, and other rulers of Israel were to be clear-minded at all times, the Lord surely does not have lower standards for leaders in the church, the Body of Christ. Paul told Timothy that a leader in the church must not be "given to wine" (Gk., *paroinon*), which literally means, "being beside wine" (1 Tim. 3:3).

A leader in the church is not to be tempted or enticed by wine. "Must" in 1 Tim. 3:2 is from the Greek particle *dei*, and carries the meaning of logical necessity rather than moral obligation. If a man desires the office of elder, it is only logical that he not be an habitual drinker.

b) Timothy in particular

In 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul tells Timothy, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thy frequent infirmities." If Timothy normally drank wine, Paul most likely would not have

had to tell him that. Paul's recommendation was for medicinal purposes only. Timothy had probably also taken himself to a higher level of commitment as a leader in the church of Jesus Christ by abstaining from wine.

The Bible prescribes a high standard for those who aspire to positions of spiritual leadership. The best choice perhaps is to align yourself with priests, kings, princes, Nazirites, and current church leaders. Every believer is to present his body as a living and holy sacrifice to God as an act of spiritual worship (Rom. 12:1-2). Everyone should then consider making the best and highest choice of abstaining from alcoholic beverages. Maybe the best choice is to stand with those who have made a decision to give their whole lives to Jesus Christ.

Question #4: Is drinking wine habit forming?

A. The Principle

Many things become habitual, and many of the habits we form are beneficial. But implied in the idea of wine as an addiction is a pattern creating a negative response. Paul said, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient" (1 Cor. 6:12). He in effect is saying, "There are things I could do, but they would trip me up or entangle me." This passage can aptly be applied to the danger of alcohol addiction.

B. The Possibility

Paul also said, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor. 6:12b). Alcohol has the potential of bringing you under its power. It easily produces an overpowering dependency that distracts one's attention and interfere with brain and bodily functions. Not only would a Christian want to avoid sin, but also the potential for sin. Food is somewhat similar to wine in its potential for sin. If you cannot control your intake of food, you are in danger of becoming gluttonous. Unlike wine, food is a necessity, but the same principle applies. A good practice is to vary your eating habits and occasionally abstain from food all together to make sure you are in control of what you eat and not vice versa. The Christian is to be controlled by the Spirit, not by ungodly influences that can lead him to sin.

Question #5: Is drinking wine potentially destructive?

A. The Biblical Evidence

1. New Testament Scriptures

a

) Ephesians 5:18--Paul uses a strong word in Ephesians 5:18 to describe the destructiveness of drunkenness. Asotia can be translated "excess" or "dissipation" and literally means "that which is unable to be saved." It was used of a person who was hopelessly and incurably sick based on loose, profligate living.

b

) Luke 15:13--Here asotia is used of the prodigal son, who engaged in "riotous living."

2. Old Testament Scriptures

a) Proverbs 20:1--Solomon said, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (cf. Prov. 4:17; 21:17; 23:21; 23:29-35).

b

c) Deuteronomy 21:20--Moses instructed parents of rebellious children to say, "This, our son, is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard." Drunkenness is often accompanied by gluttony and rebellion.

d) Isaiah 28:7-8--Isaiah said, "The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink; they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink, they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean." Wine and strong drink corrupted the prophets and the priesthood.

e) Joel 1:5; 3:3--Joel said, "Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and wail, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.... they have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that ye might drink." God withdrew from the Israelites the right to drink. They had sank to the level of selling a person for wine.

f) Hosea 7:5--Hosea said, "In the day of our king, the princes have made him [God] sick with skins of wine." Ephraim's iniquity was linked to wine.

g) Amos 2:8--Amos said the Israelites laid "themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god." They oppressed the poor in their drunken state (4:1). Amos agonized over the debauchery that comes from drunkenness and wine.

h) Habakkuk 2:15-16--Habakkuk warned, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy wineskin to him, and makest him drunk also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! Thou art filled with shame for glory; drink thou also, and let thy shame come upon thee; the cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory." Habakkuk was saying that if you make your neighbor drunk, God will spew on you His cup of judgment.

) Genesis 9:21--Noah "drank of the wine, and became drunk; and he was uncovered within his tent." Where there is drunkenness, there is immorality (cf. Gen. 19:30-35).

The Christian must ask himself if it is wise for him to have any part of something that has such great potential for destruction and sin.

B. The Statistical Evidence

(The information below is documented in Dr. S.I. McMillen's None of These Diseases [Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1963], pp. 22-28.)

1. Mental destruction

It has been estimated that 20% of all patients admitted into mental hospitals have a problem with alcohol.

2. Physical destruction

a

) To yourself

Alcoholism causes cirrhosis (hardening) of the liver, which in turn can cause a ballooning of the veins in the esophagus. The thinned-out veins are then prone to rupture when food is swallowed, potentially causing a serious or even fatal hemorrhage.

b

) To others

Alcohol is not only potentially harmful to the people who drink it, but also has a detrimental effect on the lives of innocent people. A study of autopsy findings in Middlesex County New Jersey, showed alcohol was a factor in 41.2% of violent deaths in America. A study in Delaware indicated that alcohol is the cause of nearly 50% of traffic deaths. In New York City a joint study made by the State Department of Health and Cornell University revealed that 73% of the drivers responsible for the accidents in which they died had been drinking. In Westchester County, New York, blood tests were done on eighty-three drivers who were killed in single- vehicle accidents. The tests revealed that 79% of those drivers were under the influence of alcohol.

Question #6: Is my drinking wine offensive to other Christians?

Someone may well say, "I am free in Christ. I don't want to get into legalistic bondage because someone might not be able to handle drinking alcohol." However a Christian is able to drink in moderation is not able to guarantee that his example will not cause a weaker Christian to try drinking and becomes addicted. Not only that but a former drunk who becomes a Christian will often associate many immoral and corrupt activities with drinking, and to see a fellow Christian drink most likely would offend his conscience.

A. The General Principle

The apostle Paul laid out a general principle in 1 Corinthians 8:9 that can be applied in many different instances. He said, "Take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak." A believer may very well have the liberty, maturity, and strength to drink in moderation, but he might also set the wrong example for someone who cannot handle any type of drinking. Our freedom in Christ stops when it begins to harm others, especially fellow believers. In Paul's time drunkenness was commonly associated with pagan religions. Those who came to Christ did not want to eat meat offered to idols (the context of 1 Cor. 8) anymore than they wanted to be looked upon as drinkers.

B. The Specific Principle

In Romans 14:13-21 Paul gives a more specific principle that applies to the Christian's use of his liberty. Paul said not to let any "man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.... if thy brother be grieved with thy food [or drink], now walkest thou not in love. Destroy not him with thy food [or drink], for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of" (vv. 13, 15-16).

1. The offended brother

Most of the Gentile Christians would associate drunkenness with debauchery, immorality, gluttony, and all sorts of evil. Jewish believers tended to say, "Drink up! It's no big deal to drink." The Gentile believers would be deeply offended because they felt they didn't have the freedom to drink because of their old life-style. That's what Romans 14:13-21 is trying to avoid. Our freedom in Christ should not be cherished above the welfare of another believer. Paul said believers are to "follow after the things which make for peace, and things with which one may edify another" (v. 19).

2. The weaker brother

There is another category of people--those who simply cannot handle alcohol at all. They might see another Christian drinking, assume drinking must be all right, and end up becoming addicted to alcohol. I've met too many alcoholics to ever want to inadvertently help create one! I have no control over who might follow my example and end up with a destroyed life.

3. The loving brother

Paul said, "If thy brother be grieved with thy food, now walkest thou not in love.... For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (v. 15, 17). Christians are supposed to build up their fellow believers and not tear them down. Paul ends by saying, "For food destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense. It is good neither to eat meat, nor to drink wine, nor anything by which thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (vv. 20-21). It might be O.K. to drink in moderation, but if it's going to offend others, it's better to abstain from it. You might go through your entire life adjusting to other people, but God can use that to mold you into the person He wants you to be.

Question #7: Will drinking wine harm my Christian testimony?

A. Drinking Among the Saved

Some people think they can better reach out to drinkers if they themselves drink. However Paul said, "Let not ... your good be evil spoken of" (Rom. 14:16). It is possible you can have a pure motive in drinking but it may also work against you because it offends your fellow believers. Drinking might make us more acceptable in some circles, but our lack of concern for fellow Christians would work against any positive witness we might give. If we want to reach people who are not saved, as well as

give an encouraging example to those who are, we will not do anything that would cause them to be offended. In my own ministry, I don't want anyone to be disturbed or misled by my actions. I often ask myself, "Will I hurt others with what I am about to do."

B. Drinking Among the Unsaved

Paul said, "Whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Greeks, nor to the church of God; even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:31-33). We are not to offend believers or the unsaved. If you want to reach the unsaved, let them see a difference in your life. God has established three standards: One, glorify God; two, offend no one; and three, make sure the unsaved sense a difference in your life-style.

Question #8: Am I absolutely certain drinking wine is right?

If you are convicted in any way about your drinking, that may be reason enough to stop.

A. The Conviction

A man once said to me, "I occasionally have a beer with the boys. Is that wrong?" I replied, "What do you think?" He said, "Well, I don't think it's wrong; but it bothers me." "Do you like being bothered?" I asked. "No, I don't," he said. "You know how to stop being bothered don't you?" I continued, to which he gave the obvious answer, "Yes. Stop drinking."

Paul said in Romans 14:23: "He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatever is not of faith is sin." Are you absolutely sure it's right to drink? If you have any conviction about your actions, you must deal with it. If you can't do something with a guilt-free conscience, don't do it! Ignoring your doubts will push you into deeper self-condemnation and self-imposed guilt.

B. The Conscience

Conscience is a God-given alarm that guards against sin. Whenever we go against it, we weaken it, making it less reliable. Continually going against your conscience will make it "seared ... as with a branding iron" (1 Tim. 4:2, NASB). When that happens, you lose a very powerful agent God has bestowed to lead the believer (cf. 1 Tim. 1:5, 19).

CONCLUSION

If you want to be a wise Christian, you must deal with the issue of whether you should drink. Ask yourself the following questions again: Is drinking wine the same as in Bible times? Is it necessary? Is it the best choice? Is it habit forming? Is it potentially destructive? Is it offensive to other Christians? Is it harmful to your testimony? The final question is the most important: Can you do it before others and before God, confident it is right?

Focusing on the Facts

1. A Christian has the _____ to drink.
2. True or False: There were higher standards in the Old Testament for those who had greater leadership responsibilities.
3. What was the standard for the Old Testament priesthood concerning wine and strong drink? Why did God impose that standard (Lev. 10:9)?
4. What was the standard for kings and princes (Prov. 31:4-5)?
5. What was the Nazirite vow and who could take it (Num. 6:1-5)?
6. The person taking the Nazirite vow would no longer _____ his _____ or _____ any _____.
7. How long could a Nazirite vow last?
8. Name the people mentioned in the Bible who were probably Nazirites for life. Support your answer with Scripture.
9. What did the children of Israel do to corrupt many who had taken the Nazirite vow? (Amos 2:11-12)?
10. Who were the Rechabite family and why were they singled out in Scripture (Jer. 32:2-6)?
11. What is the New Testament standard for church leaders concerning the drinking of wine?
12. If a man desires the office of elder, it is only logical that he not be an _____ drinker.
13. Why did Paul tell Timothy to drink wine?
14. Is drinking wine habit forming? Explain your answer.
15. What did Paul mean when he used the word "excess" in Ephesians 5:18?
16. Describe the potential destructiveness of alcohol. Give examples from Scripture to support your answer.
17. Describe the potential mental and physical effects of drinking alcohol.

18. Where does our freedom in Christ end?

19. What was the general difference in attitude between Jewish and Gentile believers in Paul's time concerning alcohol?

20. Could drinking wine harm your Christian testimony?

21. What are three standards God has established to guide a Christian's actions (1 Cor. 10:31-33)?

22. If you are _____ in any way about your drinking, that may be reason enough to _____.

23. What will occur if you act against your conscience?

Pondering the Principles

1. The Bible prescribes a high standard for those who aspire to positions of spiritual leadership. The Old Testament priests, kings, princes, and those taking the Nazirite vow all committed themselves to abstaining from drinking any alcoholic beverages. Do you aspire to a position of leadership within the church? The best choice for you might be to align yourself with those who abstained from alcohol. Read slowly through 1 Timothy 3 as you seek God's will in this matter.

2. Review the eight questions on the Christian's Wine List. Ask yourself those questions again and answer them to the best of your ability. Pray for God to make clear what is right for you regarding alcohol.

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