

# Alcohol and the Bible 2: Frequently Asked Questions

In all of our years of writing our online Bible studies, we have probably received more responses to my article on [Alcohol and the Bible](#) than almost any other. I realize that to some, my total abstinence stand on alcohol may seem like a somewhat "hard line" position. I am also aware that there are sincere Christians who would disagree with me. I certainly hold no ill will toward them. While both sides can offer "proof texts" for our respective views, there are certain things that I am sure we can agree on. I will specifically look at two:

1. As the article points out, there are enough Scripture references which, at the very least, put up some serious "red flags" in regards to drinking alcohol (1).
2. The Bible clearly shows us that qualities such as sobriety, self-control and yes, abstinence are virtues which God highly esteems. A good example would be John the Baptist, whose greatness in God's sight is directly linked to the fact that he "...drank no wine or strong drink" (Luke 1:15.)

Given the amount of response this article has received, I would like to briefly address some of the concerns raised by those who have taken issue with me on this important topic. Again, I have no hostility toward those who disagree with me. Ultimately, your life decisions are between you and God. Nonetheless, my many years of Bible study and human observation have only reinforced my conviction that alcohol is something that we are better off without. That being said, here are a few of the most common questions and objections:

## **I. Isn't it legalistic to teach total abstinence?**

Not at all. In fact, I am a strong advocate of Christian liberty and I firmly believe that prudishness and legalism are actually counterproductive to true holiness. Would lightning strike me if I were to drink a beer or a glass of wine? Probably not, but that really isn't the point. To me, abstinence is geared

toward three specific goals:

1. To keep my mind and spirit clear, focused and sober (Proverbs 20:1; Luke 21:34; 2 Corinthians 10:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 1 Peter 5:8).
2. To avoid addiction and enslavement (1 Corinthians 3 :17; 9: 27; 1 Thessalonians 4:4.)
3. To set a positive example for others (Matthew 5: 13-14; Romans 14:21.)

As I see it, this is not legalism, it is simply common sense!

## **II. Doesn't the Bible only condemn drinking when it is done in excess? Remember: All things in moderation!**

As David Wilkerson somewhat humorously points out, the Bible also speaks of "excess of rioting." Does that mean that its OK to riot in moderation(2)? Actually, the Scripture used to promote the idea of "all things in moderation" (Phillipians 4:5) has nothing to do with alcohol. The Greek word is *epieikes* (Strong's number 1933) and it means "mildness; patience; kindness; moderation; meekness; gentleness." With that in mind, let's read the verse in its proper context: "Let your moderation be known unto all men. *The Lord is at hand.*" In other words, as Jesus' return grows closer, we are to live lives of humility, kindness, meekness and self control.

"...but I only drink socially..." Think about what it means to do something "socially." It indicates doing something one normally doesn't do, in order to fit in with the crowd. Even aside from the alcohol issues, is living a life of pretense really what you want? Remember the stirring words of Romans 12:2 "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

## **III. What about the health benefits of alcohol? Paul told Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach.**

Even if Paul was referring to alcoholic wine in this passage (which is questionable-see previous article), the context of the verse is alcohol as a

medicine, not as a beverage. There may be some legitimate medical uses for alcohol. For example, most cough and cold medicines are alcohol based. I do not believe that it is necessarily sinful to use these products. If a person's physician advises them to drink a glass of medicinal wine, it is certainly not my place to interfere with that.

However, to use this as a justification for casual drinking is a serious stretch. Any possible health benefits of alcohol can be attained through other means. For example, the antioxidant vitamins in wine can come from numerous fruits and vegetables, vitamin supplements or even chocolate. Those who promote alcohol as a health elixir conveniently overlook the many ways in which it is detrimental to our health.

Alcohol is both more addictive and more physically harmful than many illegal drugs. Even in small quantities, it destroys blood vessels and brain cells. Over time, it can negatively effect practically every organ in the human body. Alcohol's damaging effects on the liver are well known, as well as the harm a drinking mother can do to an unborn child (fetal alcohol syndrome). It is also linked to cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx and esophagus, as well as numerous heart and cardiovascular problems. Hospitals, hospices and treatment centers everywhere see the devastating effects of alcohol every day. Do we *really* want to take these kinds of risks with our lives?

#### **IV. Since they had no mechanical refrigeration in Bible days, wasn't fermenting grape juice necessary in order to preserve it?**

Actually, this argument makes the opposite point. Fermentation must take place in a very controlled environment, no less than 50 degrees Fahrenheit, no more than 75. At higher temperatures, the grape juice will simply sour, rather than ferment. Distillation had not yet been discovered. Given the hot climates in Bible lands, fermentation did not offer much of an option in preserving their grape crops (3). Instead, the farmers in Bible days had a number of innovative preservation methods that did not involve fermentation. One common method was to boil the juice down into a thick paste, store it in skins, then mixit with water when they wanted to drink it. Even when fermented wine was used, it was generally diluted with water until it contained very little alcohol. To drink undiluted wine was considered to be an act of barbarians (4).

Can we split hairs over the semantics of this issue? Yes, but in the long run, it becomes pointless. To me, the choice is clear: Either engage in an act which God describes as being deceptive and destructive, or honor God by abstaining from this act, and take a step toward greatness in His eyes. Even if it turns out that I am wrong, and that I have interpreted these Scriptures incorrectly, what have I lost? Drinking alcohol would bring nothing positive into my life, but it could potentially bring a great deal of negative. Ultimately, one fact is clear: No one ever became an alcoholic who didn't take the first drink.

1-For a good overview of this, see *The Evil of Drink* by w. Albert Smith:  
<http://www.tbaptist.com/aab/evilofdrink.htm>

2-Wilkerson, David. *Sipping Saints*. 1978. David Wilkerson Publications, Lindale, Texas. p 52.

Ibid.

3-See William Patton's *Bible Wines and Laws of Fermentation*, 1871. Star Bible Publication, Fort Worth, Texas.

4-Taken from John MacArthur, *Be Not Drunk With Wine* Part 2:  
<http://www.biblebb.com/files/mac/sg1937.htm>