

Scripture's Teaching Regarding Alcohol (5)

The Sin of Drunkenness

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

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these:
...drunkenness...
Of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past,
that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.
Galatians 5:19-21*

*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess;
but be filled with the Spirit;
Ephesians 5:18a*

Drinking alcohol, we have seen, is not sinful in itself. Certainly God does not require us to use it in our personal and social lives, but neither does he forbid us to use it.

With two exceptions.

That is, two uses of alcohol God does clearly forbid.

One of these we noted in our second article: any use of alcohol which is contrary to the laws of the state. For young people this means particularly that God considers underage drinking a sin. And for people of all ages this means that God considers driving while intoxicated or impaired, driving with an open container, and other such transgressions of civil law to be sin. They are sin against the fifth commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother," which by implication requires us to honor all in authority over us.

To the second sinful use of alcohol we must turn our attention. We refer to the sin of drunkenness, or the immoderate use of alcohol.

We must emphasize this point.

We must, first, because it is part of what Scripture teaches regarding alcohol. If we overlook Scripture's condemnation of the sin of drunkenness, we have not presented God's revealed will concerning this subject fairly and accurately.

Secondly, we must emphasize this point so that young people do not think lightly of drunkenness. It is, of course, possible to think lightly of this sin. Perhaps some think of it as being cool, a way to prove one's independence from parents, a way to gain the approval of one's peers. So we must know that the person who was drunk or is drunk has not gained God's approval. God condemns drunkenness as sin. He condemns the act of drinking to the point of drunkenness as sin. He hates this sin so much that, as I Corinthians 6:9-10 teaches, he will punish the drunkard who remains impenitent regarding his sin by excluding him from the final perfection of his kingdom.

Do you enjoy drinking beer immoderately? Do you try at times to find relief from your troubles by drinking in excess? Do you think drunkenness is cool?

God thinks otherwise.



To be drunk is to be under the control of wine or strong drink.

To be drunk does not only mean that you have had so much to drink that you are passed out, that you are unconscious of your surroundings or what others are doing to you. When you are at that point, you have been drunk for some time.

To be drunk is to be unable to function normally—to walk normally, talk normally, think and discern normally. The walk, speech, and thought process of one who is drunk is controlled by alcohol. He cannot walk straight. He cannot always think rationally. He cannot talk clearly. The reason is that his brain is affected by alcohol.

This happens more quickly than one thinks. In the third article, in which we explained what it means to drink a "little" wine, we explained this point.

That such is sin God's Word makes clear in the passages quoted above, as well as other passages. Ephesians 5:18 is clear: "be not drunk with wine."

Because it is sin, bodily drunkenness is a picture of the spiritual drunkenness of one not in the kingdom of God. So he who commits such sins without being sorry for them shows himself to be not in the kingdom of God.



But how easy to fall into the sin! The command not to be drunk is necessary, not only because our nature enjoys drunkenness, but also because wine and strong drink are deceitful.

This is the point of Proverbs 20:1: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”

In this verse, God portrays wine and strong drink as if they were persons, mocking the one drinking them. Wine mocks, that is, speaks scornfully and arrogantly to the one drinking; and strong drink roars loudly and boisterously at him.

How? By promising to give happiness to the one who drinks, but not delivering on this promise.

We have noted in the past that a little wine has a good effect, cheering the heart and calming the nerves.

To the one who has had a little, and who is feeling the good effects of alcohol, wine and strong drink say mockingly and boisterously: “If a little is good, a lot is better, so have some more! What? You think you are going to stop drinking now? What are you, a wimp? Don’t you know that if you drink more, you will be even more happy? Think of all the fun you are going to miss out on!”

But he who listens to this taunting voice finds that wine and strong drink do not deliver on their promise. While a little wine cheers his heart, a lot sickens him, leaves him miserable, and can even bring physical death. In addition, it leaves him without the enjoyment of God’s love and fellowship.

This deception has its root in Satan, who is a liar, and the father of the lie (John 8:44).

The wise man will not be deceived. Proverbs 20:1 indicates this in the text itself: “whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” Ephesians 5:18 indicates this in its relation to the verse preceding: “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”

That wise man is not just the man with earthly wisdom; not just the one who learned wisdom from past experience; but the one in whom Christ lives, and who desires to serve God as he commands us in his Word.

He will consider, as he drinks, that to become drunken is sin; that wine is a mocker; and that he will drink to God’s glory, and not be brought under the bondage of wine.

Next time, God willing, we will continue to show that drunkenness is sin by speaking of its physical and moral effects.

