

To Drink, or Not to Drink?

A Scriptural Study of Social Drinking

By Pastor Mark Tossell



“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”
(Proverbs 20:1)

Introduction

Drinking alcoholic beverages is an integral part of Australian society and culture. Most every child in the 1970's grew up singing the ditty, “I feel like a Tooheys” as they watched their favourite sports hero down a cold beer on the television set. Australians are well known around the world for their love of beer and wine. A barbecue in the back yard of the typical Australian home would not be complete without a few “tinnies.” However, most people never take the time to examine the use of alcohol in the light of Scripture, science, and social impact.

Do we have a problem with drinking in our fair land? Let the secular press answer that question for us:

“Almost a **million** Australians can be classified as **alcohol-dependent** and of these, almost **one-third** have a **mental disorder**, according to a national survey.

A special analysis of the statistics prepared by the University of NSW's National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre also reveals that alcohol abuse is particularly prevalent among young people with up to **15 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds classified as alcoholic**... of all people with alcohol disorders, young people were also the most likely group to have one other of the three main types of mental health problems - anxiety, affective or drug use disorder.

The study defined alcohol abuse or dependence by a series of indicators, including the existence of withdrawal symptoms when use is reduced or stopped and persistent desires or unsuccessful efforts to stop drinking.”

(The Sydney Morning Herald, 13/10/99)

The fact is that there are few, if any, more evil, more destructive and more addictive forces in our society today than booze. I will prove conclusively by the evidence of Scripture, science, and social impact that spiritual Christians must take a stand for total abstinence from alcohol.

I. The Evidence of Scripture

There are 552 references to drinking, drunkenness, wine or strong drink in the Bible. Obviously the Lord is not silent on the subject! Let us break up our study into several sub-headings:

a) Sorcery, drug use, and alcohol

The sin of sorcery is mentioned several times in the Bible. For example,

Revelation 9:21 “Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their **sorceries**, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”

Revelation 21:8 “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and **sorcerers**, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

Revelation 22:15 “For without are dogs, and **sorcerers**, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.”

The word sorcery in the Bible has several different meanings:

Sorcery - Greek: *pharmakeus* - from *pharmakon* - druggist, drug user, poisoner, magician, sorcerer.

Therefore, God places sorcery, including **using drugs**, on the same wicked plane as murder, fornication, lying, immorality, and idolatry. So, if alcohol is a drug, then it is a sin to take alcohol. What is the definition of a drug? Does alcohol qualify to be defined as a drug?

Consider these definitions:

Drug - "An often illegal and sometimes **addictive** substance that causes **changes in behaviour** and is taken for the effects." (Encarta 2000) "A **narcotic** substance, especially one which induces **addiction**, such as opium." (New Webster's Dictionary)

Narcotic - "something that **soothes, induces sleep, relieves pain or stress**, or causes **a sensation of mental numbness**." (Encarta 2000) "A drug which **dulls sensibility, relieves pain, and induces sleepiness**." (New Webster's Dictionary)

(Encarta 2000) "A drug which **dulls sensibility, relieves pain, and induces sleepiness**." (New Webster's Dictionary)

Alcohol is addictive; it causes changes in behaviour; it soothes, induces sleep, relieves pain or stress; it causes a sensation of mental numbness. It can safely be concluded that **alcohol is a drug**, and so **drinking alcohol is taking drugs, and is sin**.

b) Drunkenness

Even most liberals agree that it is a sin to be drunk. For example, consider these plain Scriptures that denounce drunkenness:

Romans 13:13 "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and **drunkenness**, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."

1 Corinthians 5:11 "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a **drunkard**, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat."

Galatians 5:21 "Envyings, murders, **drunkenness**, revellings, and such like: 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."

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

Consider these questions: What is the definition of drunk? Is there such a thing as "responsible drinking," or "drinking in moderation?"

Alcohol - "**intoxicating** drinks containing alcohol" (Encarta 2000); "a colourless, volatile, **intoxicating**, inflammable liquid" (New Webster's Dictionary)

Drunk - "**intoxicated** by alcohol" (New Webster's Dictionary)

- Greek - *methuo* - "intoxicated, tipsy, drunk"

Intoxicated - "to cause to lose mental or physical control" (New Webster's Dictionary)

The definition of drunkenness would then be "to lose mental or physical control due to the effects of alcohol." How does the drinker know when they are "under the influence?" Can science tell us when a person is influenced or not? Is there a certain blood-alcohol level under which a person is not intoxicated? Let us consider the dilemma of authorities trying to determine the safe blood-alcohol level for someone driving a motor vehicle. Is there a standard limit around the world, or at least around the country? NO! Blood-alcohol limits range from 0% to 0.1% depending upon the state and national laws. Provisional license holders in NSW are not allowed to have any trace of alcohol in their blood stream when driving. Why? **Because no one can determine the "safe" level of alcohol use.** Note the following article:

"In recent years the offence of driving under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs has been taken increasingly seriously, as the number of accidents caused by drunken driving have emerged. **The difficulty of proving that a driver was appreciably affected by drink** led in the 1960s and 1970s to the introduction of tests using breath-testing machines to determine the level of alcohol in the blood. An offence arises if the level exceeds a certain limit. In certain countries, notably Scandinavia, **it is an offence to drive with any amount of alcohol in the bloodstream.** ..."

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It is not possible for someone to know if they are affected by alcohol or not, or for them to decide a "moderate" level of drinking. A person cannot really know when they are intoxicated, or drunken, by the true definition of the word. The question we must ask is not, "Am I intoxicated?" but rather, "How intoxicated am I?" because alcohol is, by its very definition, intoxicating. **Therefore, the only safe and spiritual position for a Christian to take is one of complete abstinence from the use of alcohol.** If drunkenness is such a serious sin, and the Bible says it is, then the only way to be sure of staying free of the sin of intoxication is to remain free of alcohol.

c) Wine in the Bible

What does the word "wine" refer to in the Bible?

There are two Hebrew words frequently used in the Old Testament for wine:

Yayin - wine; as a common drink; as a drink offering; intoxicating; figuratively.

Tirosh - fresh or sweet wine.

The two Greek words used in the New Testament for wine are:

Oinos - wine, either fermented or unfermented.

Gleukos - must, new, sweet wine; or, grape juice (Acts 2:13 only).

Wine has been manufactured from earliest times and is first mentioned in the Bible in connection with the drunkenness of Noah (Gen. 9:21), which in turn led to the sin of his son, Ham. The vineyard provided one of man's first sources of both the sugar so necessary for his health and the alcohol so harmful to his health.

The "pure blood of the grape" (Deut. 32:14) is, in itself, not only harmless but sweet and healthful. It is only after the grape sugar, through the fermentation process caused by the yeast bacteria that collect on the grape skins, is broken down into alcohol and carbon dioxide, that the wine becomes harmful. Fermentation is essentially a decay process, in which the complex sugar molecules are caused to break down into the simpler molecules of alcohol. At body temperature, sugar taken into the system is inhibited from this type of decay and instead is a prime source of energy for the body's activities. Alcohol, on the other hand, is itself a cause of bodily decay, entering the blood stream undigested and thence attacking the nervous system and the entire bodily structure, causing damage everywhere it goes and, eventually, if enough is ingested, death.

Oinos may refer either to alcoholic wine or unfermented grape juice. A parallel usage in modern English would be our use of the word "cider" to refer either to sweet cider or to hard (alcoholic) cider, as the context may indicate. There is an abundance of both ancient Hebrew and Greek secular literature available to verify that both fermented and unfermented "wines" were in common use by the people of that day. Some claim that there was no way of preserving grape juice without it fermenting, and thus concluding that only alcoholic wine was drunk at the time of Christ. However, this is not supported by the historical facts. Means for preserving grape juice were well known: Cato, *De Agri Cultura* CXX has this recipe: "If you wish to have must (grape juice) all year, put grape juice in an amphora and seal the cork with pitch; sink it in a fish pond. After 30 days take it out. It will be grape juice for a whole year." At the Last Supper Jesus spoke of "the fruit of the vine" (Matt. 26:29), as in the Passover liturgy; it may be a studied avoidance of the term wine, indicating that the drink was unfermented, as the bread was unleavened.

Some have supposed that Acts 2:13 proves that the early Christians drank alcoholic wine:

Acts 2:13 "Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine."

But, the Greek word translated as "wine" in the text is *gleukos*, which refers to unfermented grape juice. Several Greek lexicons and scholars acknowledge that *gleukos* designates exclusively unfermented grape juice. For example, Horace Bumstead... offers this clear and conclusive explanation: "... with the Greeks the product of the wine-press could be sweet in three different senses: first, as *gleukos* (corresponding to the Latin *mustum*), when it was sweet from the lack of vinous fermentation; second, as *oinos gleukos*, when it was fermented, but sweet from the presence of considerable untransformed sugar; and third, as *oinos hedus*, when it was sweet from the absence of acetous fermentation, or souring." What this means is that when *Gleukos* occurs by itself, as in Acts 2:13, it refers specifically to **unfermented** grape juice.

The only way of accurately knowing whether the wine (*Oinos*) referred to is fermented (corrupted) wine or pure grape juice is from the context of the Scripture, and by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

d) Bible verses which reprove drinking and drunkenness

The Bible contains many Scriptures that denounce drinking and drunkenness. Here are a few examples:

* We are not to be around those who drink alcohol and those who are gluttonous:

Proverbs 23:20-21 "Be not among winebibbers [drunkards; wine drinkers]; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

* We are not to even look at wine, in case we would indulge in it and so end up drunken.

Proverbs 23:29-35 "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. **Look not thou upon the wine when it is red,** when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. **At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.** Thine eyes shall behold **strange women**, and thine heart shall utter **perverse things**. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."

* Those in authority are not to drink.

Proverbs 31:4-5 "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to **drink wine**; nor for princes **strong drink**: Lest they drink, and **forget the law**, and **pervert the judgment** of any of the afflicted."

* We are not to drink alcohol because a brother who is weak may fall back into sin because of our actions.

Romans 14:21-23 "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing **whereby thy brother stumbleth**, or is **offended**, or is **made weak**. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for **whatsoever is not of faith is sin.**"

* It is a sin to give an alcoholic drink to our neighbour.

Habakkuk 2:15 “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!”

* There is a curse placed on those who would drink booze all day.

Isaiah 5:11, 22 “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow **strong drink**; that continue until night, till **wine** inflame them! Woe unto them that are **mighty to drink wine**, and men of strength to **mingle strong drink**.”

* Alcohol will make you to fall, to make mistakes, and to travel the wrong path of life.

Isaiah 28:1 “**Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim**, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are **overcome with wine!**”

Isaiah 28:7-8 “**But they also have erred through wine**, and **through strong drink are out of the way**; 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.”

* God commands the drunkards and drinkers of wine to humble themselves.

Joel 1:5 “Awake, **ye drunkards**, and **weep**; and **howl, all ye drinkers of wine**, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.”

* The drunkard’s main problem is pride.

Habakkuk 2:5 “Yea also, because **he transgresseth by wine**, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:”

* We are always to be sober, to be in complete control of our senses, and to be serious.

1 Peter 5:8 “Be **sober**, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”

* **There are ten references to drink in the book of wisdom, Proverbs.** The first four references make no judgment on wine or grape juice, but the last six references are **strongly against alcohol**:

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” (30:1)

“He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.” (21:17)

“For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.” (23:21)

“They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.” (23:30)

“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.” (23:31)

“As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.” (26:9)

e) Some men in the Bible who were hurt by drink

As a result of drinking, Noah caused his son to sin by his nakedness:

Genesis 9:21 “And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.”

As a result of drinking, Lot committed incest:

Genesis 19:33 “And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.”

As a result of drinking, Amnon was killed:

2 Samuel 13:28 “Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon’s heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant.”

As a result of drinking, King Elah was murdered:

1 Kings 16:9 “And his servant Zimri, captain of half his chariots, conspired against him, as he was in Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza steward of his house in Tirzah.”

f) “Under the influence”

The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, made the following statement:

1 Corinthians 6:12 “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but **I will not be brought under the power of any.**”

What he is saying is that it is wrong for him to be controlled by any power outside himself. The only person or thing that should control his thoughts or actions is the Holy Spirit. He must remain able to make sensible, wise, spiritual decisions, free from any power that would bring his will into bondage. That means that is wrong for Paul, and for any Christian, to be addicted to any substance or activity. We are not to lose control of our mind or bodies. Possible addictions include gambling, pornography, and alcoholism. If we are to avoid these, and other, addictions, then what is the safest strategy? **Abstain from**

any involvement in the activity that may become addictive. There is no alcoholic in this world that did not begin with his first social drink, his first taste of liquor. **If we would surely avoid the sin of addiction to liquor, we must abstain from the use of alcohol.**

Why is it so wrong to be under the influence of alcohol? Consider the command:

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

If a person allows his actions to be controlled in any degree by wine or by drugs, or by money, or by pride, or by anything else, then of course they are not controlled by the Holy Spirit, and he is therefore not filled with the Spirit. A very literal translation of this passage would be: “And **do not even begin to be drunk with wine**, wherein is debauchery, but rather be continually being filled with the Spirit.” The context of this verse is very important. Leading up to it, evidently because these are prerequisites to a truly Spirit-controlled life, are admonitions to “walk circumspectly” (5:15), to “redeem the time” (5:16), and to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (5:17). That is, one can hardly expect to have a Spirit-controlled life unless he is really concerned to order all his behaviour and to use all his time in a way that conforms to God's will. He must allow **nothing else**, of which wine is the typical example, to **gain any control over his life**.

g) The appearance of evil

1 Thessalonians 5:21-23 “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. **Abstain from all appearance of evil.**

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved **blameless** unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Word of God commands us to not only abstain from that which is evil and sinful, but to even be careful to avoid the appearance of evil. Why? For the sake of a **clean, blameless testimony**. If it were true that social drinking were not wrong, we should not be seen drinking alcohol in case others might assume that we were getting drunk. If we are in a pub and drinking one middie of beer with our “friends” whom are getting drunk, would not the casual observer conclude that we are there to become intoxicated? That would then mean that we have assumed the appearance of evil, and are guilty of sin. Also, Proverbs 23:20 (quoted earlier) commands us to refrain from the company of those consuming booze, so we are twice guilty for being in the wrong place with the wrong people.

h) Historical Confirmation

“In his epistles, Peter, who acts as the spokesman of the Jerusalem Church in the first twelve chapters of Acts, alludes to the practice of abstinence in the apostolic church. Later historical confirmation of this practice is provided by the testimony of Hegesippus, a church historian who, as Eusebius tells us, “lived immediately after the apostles.” Writing regarding “James, the brother of the Lord, [who] succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles,” Hegesippus says: “He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh.” We can assume that the strict abstinent life-style of James, who for a time served as the presiding officer of the Jerusalem Church, served as an example for Apostolic Christians to follow.”

(Wine in the Apostolic Church)

i) Deciding Questionable Things for the Christian

Dr. Curtis Hutson gives us eleven Bible principles for deciding whether or not to indulge in a practice that is questionable.

Perhaps you may not yet be fully convinced that drinking is wrong. Some say, “Well, I'm not under the law; I'm under grace. I have the liberty to do whatever I think is good and right.” What does the Bible say?

* We are not to use the covenant of grace (Romans 6) as an excuse to sin and live selfishly.

Romans 6:15 “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? **God forbid.**”

Galatians 5:13 “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only **use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh**, but by love serve one another.”

If you are unsure about the sin of social drinking, take this eleven point test to see if the Lord would have you drink alcohol:

1. Are you willing to do what is right once you know God's will? John 7:17.
2. Does it agree with all that Scripture has to say on the subject? 2 Peter 1:20; 2 Timothy 3:16,17.
3. Have you prayed about it? Philippians 4:6,7.
4. Do you have the leading of the Holy Spirit? Romans 8:14.
5. Does it please God? 1 John 3:22.
6. Can you do it in the name of the Lord Jesus? Colossians 3:17.
7. Can you give God thanks for it? Colossians 3:17.
8. Does it bring glory to God? 1 Corinthians 10:31.
9. Does it offend other Christians? 1 Corinthians 8:13.
10. Am I fully persuaded that it is right? Romans 14:5, 23.
11. Do the best Christians I know agree that it is right? Proverbs 12:15, 24:6

You might be saying, “Well, I just feel like drinking in moderation is okay. In my heart I think it’s not a sin. I know it *might* be wrong, but I don’t think it’s a big deal.” Let the Word of God judge such an attitude:

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.” (Proverbs 12:15)

“The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways...” (Proverbs 14:14a)

“... for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” (Romans 14:23b)

j) Some Bible passages that are wrongly used to justify drinking

In an attempt to justify their “liberty,” Christians use a few vague passages to prove that the Word of God sanctions “drinking in moderation”. However, a diligent study of the passages in question soon puts their arguments to rest.

A vital principle of hermeneutics, or Bible interpretation, is the **synthesis principle**. This principle says that Scripture interprets Scripture. Obscure passages in the Bible may be understood in the light of clearer ones. One should never build a doctrine on a single obscure or unclear text:

2 Peter 1:20 “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.”

Those who use the following passages, and others, to justify their drinking habit, usually violate this principle.

Let us examine three of the common passages that are misused by drinkers:

Firstly:

1 Timothy 3:3 “**Not given to wine**, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;”

1 Timothy 3:8 “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, **not given to much wine**, not greedy of filthy lucre;”

Answer:

Some conclude from these two verses that we can drink in moderation, but we must not give ourselves to wine, or overindulge in it. Consider the Greek words used for “given” in the two verses above:

Paroinos - 1 Timothy 3:3 - staying near wine.

Prosecho - 1 Timothy 3:8 - pay attention to, apply oneself to, be given to, have regard to, be attached to, to give oneself up to, to be addicted to.

In the case of verse 3, the bishop must not even stay near wine. **That certainly must imply complete abstinence from alcohol.**

In the case of verse 8, the deacon must not become addicted to or attached to drinking much wine. Wine here cannot be alcoholic wine, because only one case of drinking much fermented wine would be sin. Other believers would have to break fellowship with the man in such a case (1 Corinthians 5:11). Most of these were converts from idolatry and were previously used to a life of voluptuousness and sensuality. The dissipated and voluptuous preferred the wine whose strength (potency) had been broken by filter, because it enabled them to drink much without becoming intoxicated. They used various methods to promote thirst. They would continue at times all night at their feasts. Excessive drinking, even of non-alcoholic drinks, was a vice prevalent in the days of Paul, also common - the excessive use of food, but not of an intoxicating kind. Paul is merely guarding the deacons against a vice of the day. Such devotion to any kind of wine would show sensuality unseemly in one holding office in the church. **This verse therefore would be admonishing the deacon to guard himself against overindulging in the appetites of the flesh, specifically grape juice.** It would be like commanding him to refrain from gluttony.

Secondly:

John 2:3-11 “And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”

Answer:

Christians claim that Jesus Christ here served as the brewer and bartender for a group of drunken guests at a wedding, creating and serving to them about **500 litres of alcoholic wine**. How ridiculous! How blasphemous! The question is, was this wine fermented, or was it just pure grape juice? Scripture will clarify this for us. Consider **Habbakkuk 2:15**:

“**Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink**, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!”

Here God places a curse on the one who gives an alcoholic drink to his neighbour (take note, bottle shop and pub owners). So, if the wine in John 2 were fermented, God would punish the Lord Jesus for His sin!

It is significant that, in establishing the Lord's Supper, Jesus was always careful to use the phrase “fruit of the vine,” instead of “wine,” lest He be misunderstood. Alcohol, the product of putrefaction and decay and thus the perfect symbol of death, could certainly not represent the life-giving quality of the blood of the Lord Jesus symbolised in the cup at His table. Furthermore, He frequently warned against drunkenness (note Luke 21:34; 12:45, etc.). Thus it is extremely unlikely that He would create a

substance at a wedding feast which would cause drunkenness! The guests had already exhausted the copious supplies of intoxicating wine on hand and were probably already drunk. He transformed approximately 500 litres of water into that many gallons of "good wine" (John 2:6, 10), and if this was intoxicating wine, it would certainly have turned the wedding celebration, with the guests already inebriated and demanding more wine, into a drunken brawl!

The wine that He made was, in fact, new wine, freshly created. It was not old, decayed wine, as it would have to be if it were intoxicating. There was no time for the fermentation process to break down the structure of its energy-giving sugars into disintegrative alcohols. **Therefore, the wine in John chapter 2 must refer to pure, unfermented grape juice - not alcoholic wine.**

It is interesting to note that men at the time of Christ not only preserved their grape juices unfermented, but "called them wines, and regarded them as of a higher flavour and finer quality than fermented wine. Such evidence is to be found in almost any classical authority. So say Plato, Columella, Pliny, Aristotle, Horace, Homer, Plutarch, and others. Many of these gave in detail the very processes of boiling, filtering, and sulphurisation by which the wine were preserved from fermentation. There were, therefore, two kinds of wine in ancient use. The one was sweet, pleasant, refreshing and unfermented; the other was exciting, inflaming, and intoxicating. Each was called wine." (William Patton)

Thirdly,

1 Timothy 5:23 "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."

Answer:

The argument given here is if it's good to take a little wine for medicinal purposes, then it must be okay for Christians to drink in moderation. There are two serious flaws in this argument:

- i) The wine here may speak of pure, non-alcoholic grape juice; there is nothing that says it is fermented. Grape juice is known to be good for the stomach and intestines. Athenaeus says, "Let him take sweet wine (*gleukos*), either mixed with water or warmed, especially that called *protropos*, as being very good for stomach."
- ii) If it is okay to use medicines that contain a small amount of alcohol, then why does that justify drinking alcoholic beverages for pleasure? When I was in the hospital a few years ago, I was on a strong pain killer called pethidine. Pethidine is related to morphine, and causes some quite unusual side effects, such as drowsiness, loss of memory, double-vision, etc. By the logic of some, I should be free to indulge in such drugs for pleasure. How foolish. Let us not be guilty of putting thoughts into Scripture that God did not put there.

Ask yourself the question: Should you lie "in moderation?" Should you commit adultery "in moderation?" Should you steal "in moderation?" Of course not. Then how can it be right to be drunk "in moderation?" **The Bible is clear that drinking alcohol is not only dangerous and unwise, it is sin.**

II. The Evidence of Science

Science teaches us that, without exception, alcohol is a dangerous, unhealthy, deceptive and poisonous drug.

Dr. Charles H. Mayo, founder of the world-famous Mayo Clinic, made the following statement:

"You can get along with a wooden leg, but you can't get along with a wooden head, The physical value of man is not so much. Man, as analyzed in our laboratories, is worth about ninety-eight cents; seven bars of soap, lime enough to whitewash a chicken coop, phosphorous enough to cover the heads of a thousand matches. This is not very much you see. It is the brain that counts. **But in order that your brain may be kept clear you must keep your body fit and well. That cannot be done if one drinks liquor.** A man who has to drag around a habit that is a danger and a menace to society ought to go off to the woods and live alone. We do not tolerate the obvious use of morphine or cocaine or opium **and we should not tolerate intoxicating liquor** because I tell you these things are what break down the command of the individual over his own life and his own destiny. Through alcohol a man loses his coordination. That is why liquor is no advantage to the brain. You hear people tell how they had their wits quickened for the first half-hour by liquor, but they don't tell you how later their bodies could not act in coordination with their brain."

"Alcohol is nowhere to be found in any product of nature, never created by God, but is essentially an artificial thing prepared by man through the destructive process of fermentation." (Dr. Monroe) The manufacture of alcohol is wholly man's device. The assertion that alcohol is in sugar and in all unfermented saccharine substances that are nutritious is contradicted by medical science.

Dr. William F Boos, toxicologist, states:

"Alcohol is a poison, classed among the narcotic drugs along with chloral, ethyl, chloride, chloroform, ether, toluol and benzol. It acts as poison acts."

"Alcohol is, in fact, treated by the human system not as food but as an **intruder** and as a **poison.**" (Dr. James Edmunds).

What exactly is a poison?

Poison - "anything having a pernicious [destructive, injurious] effect on the mind or character of an individual" (New Webster's Dictionary); "something that exercises a powerful destructive or corrupting force, especially in an insidious way" (Encarta 2000)

Brain and nervous system cells are the first to be affected by alcohol. After their destruction by alcohol, they are lost forever. Unlike most other body cells, they cannot be regenerated. The demonic killer is daily at work destroying the minds and bodies of millions of people who boast that they drink moderately but have never been drunk.

"What is alcohol? The answer is a **poison**. It is so regarded by the best writers and teachers on toxicology who class it with arsenic, corrosive sublimate and prussic acid. Like these poisons, when introduced into the system, it is capable of **destroying life** without acting mechanically." (William Patton).

What does God say about such destruction of the human body by booze?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore **glorify God in your body**, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Alcoholism, the sad state of many social drinkers who develop a dependence upon alcohol, is a plague that is tearing apart lives and families in Australia today. Approximately one in 19 Australians are affected by this awful condition. What are the scientific facts concerning this epidemic?

"Alcoholism is a chronic and usually progressive illness involving the excessive inappropriate ingestion of ethyl alcohol, whether in the form of familiar alcoholic beverages or as a constituent of other substances....It is characterized by an emotional and often physical dependence on alcohol, and **it frequently leads to brain damage or early death....Alcoholism usually develops over a period of years**. Early and subtle symptoms include placing excessive importance on the availability of alcohol. Ensuring this availability strongly influences the person's choice of associates or activities. Alcohol comes to be used more as a mood-changing drug than as a foodstuff or beverage served as a part of social custom or religious ritual. Initially, the alcoholic may demonstrate a high tolerance to alcohol, consuming more and showing fewer adverse effects than others. Subsequently, however, **the person begins to drink against his or her own best interests**, as alcohol comes to assume more importance than personal relationships, work, reputation, or even physical health. **The person commonly loses control over drinking and is increasingly unable to predict how much alcohol will be consumed on a given occasion** or, if the person is currently abstaining, when the drinking will resume again. **Physical addiction to the drug may occur**, sometimes eventually leading to drinking around the clock to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

Alcohol has direct toxic as well as sedative effects on the body, and failure to take care of nutritional and other physical needs during prolonged periods of excessive drinking may further complicate matters. Advanced cases often require hospitalization. The **effects on major organ systems are cumulative** and include a wide range of **digestive-system disorders** such as ulcers, inflammation of the pancreas, and cirrhosis of the liver. **The central and peripheral nervous systems can be permanently damaged. Blackouts, hallucinations, and extreme tremors may occur. The latter symptoms are involved in the most serious alcohol withdrawal syndrome, delirium tremens, which can prove fatal despite prompt treatment.** This is in contrast to withdrawal from opiate drugs such as heroin, which, although distressing, rarely results in death. Recent evidence has shown that heavy and even moderate **drinking during pregnancy can cause serious damage to the unborn child: physical or mental retardation, or both**; a rare but severe expression of this damage is known as foetal alcohol syndrome.

... **estimates of the annual number of deaths related to excessive drinking exceed 97,000 in the United States alone**. The incidence of alcohol dependence in the Russian Federation, based on hospital admission data, is approximately 12 per 100,000 individuals. The European Alcohol Action Plan of the World Health Organization (WHO) is dedicated to reducing alcohol consumption by 25 per cent between 1980 and 2000, with particular emphasis on supporting the former USSR." (Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.)

"But," you say, "I'm not a drunk. **I just drink in moderation.**" Consider these chilling facts:

"Contrary to common belief, **most people with alcohol problems are moderate to light drinkers** - ie., they consume 2-13 drinks per week. **The most serious and immediate effects are on the brain**, for after even **one or two drinks of alcohol**, the frontal lobes are affected, and people are less able to understand the potential dangers and costs of a particular action. Many tests have shown that their judgement is impaired, peripheral vision is decreased, and thinking is confused. The potential for disaster is compounded by depressed inhibitions, altered moods and impaired coordination.

But the damage does not stop there. Alcohol increases the risk of cancer. It is believed to influence practically every known step of the carcinogenic process. There is consistent evidence that alcohol intake increases cancer of the mouth, throat, liver, pancreas, rectum and breast. It also depresses appetite, provides empty calories, damages the liver and kidneys, and increases the risk of stroke and heart attack."

(Dr. Christina Naylor)

The scientific facts are very clear: alcohol is a dangerous, lethal, and deceptive drug.

III. The Evidence of Social Impact

Philippians 2:4 “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of **others**.”

Romans 15:2 “Let every one of us **please his neighbour** for his good to edification.”

We may think that a little drink now and then will not hurt us. But what about the impact of booze upon society? What kind of industry are we supporting when we buy alcohol? Is alcohol hurting our neighbours, our city, and our country?

The National Committee for Defence Against Alcoholism speaks for the highest levels of French medicine. They state: "Alcoholism is caused by a slow and unperceived impregnation of the organism with alcohol. Hundreds of thousands are alcoholics who have never been drunk, for alcoholism is a permanent state, due to repeated consumption of small amounts of alcoholic drink. **Alcoholism is more disastrous to the offspring of the alcoholic than to the alcoholic himself.** Apart from bad example and alcoholic poverty, the alcoholic bequeaths to his children many different deficiencies. Fifty to 90% of degenerates are children of alcoholics Degenerates and children of degenerates, they often crumble into maniacs. **From the pitiful flock of sons and daughters of drunkards are recruited social rebels, misfits, the vicious, prostitutes and criminals in a proportion of 75 percent.**"

We talk much about delinquency today. We have plans and educational programs, social organisations and entertainment committees, various organisations working to try to curb the delinquency on every hand. **Some juvenile authorities insist that 80% of juvenile criminals are victims of the alcoholism of their parents.** Curb alcoholism and you will curb the majority of the cases of delinquency.

Doctors who have made a study of alcoholism compiled the following questions and answers. Listen carefully:

- Can a girl drink and still remain virtuous? NO.
- Do more people drink today than 20 years ago? YES.
- Is moderate drinking dangerous? YES.
- Can drinking lead to sexual promiscuity? YES.
- Can alcoholism lead to crimes of violence? YES.
- What percentage of alcohol in the blood may cause death? Less than 1.1%.
- Can drinking cause permanent insanity? YES.
- What is regarded as the greatest single cause of insanity in the U.S.? Alcohol.

What are the social impacts of drinking booze?

- Drink driving fills our cemeteries with thousands of innocent victims.
- Young people lose their purity while their inhibitions and conscience are dulled by drink.
- Many a father wastes his income and deprives his family of the necessities of life so that he can drink his fill and drown his sorrows.
- Men spend time with their “mates” at the pub while their families sit at home alone, deprived of their husband and father.
- **One million** Australian men or women who only intended to have “a drink or two” are now slaves to the bottle.
- About **300,000** Australian alcoholics are brain-damaged by booze.
- Social drinkers pour God’s money into a vile industry that lowers the morals and dulls the judgment.
- Women and children are beaten and violated by drunken fathers who are decent men when not overcome by the demon of liquor.
- Unwise and regrettable decisions are made while under the influence of alcohol.
- Irresponsible acts of violence are committed by otherwise law-abiding citizens while their judgment and conscience are clouded by drink.

What do some of the great minds of the past have to say about drinking?

Shakespeare: “Alcohol is a poison men take into the mouth to steal away the brain.”

Gladstone: “Strong drink is more destructive than war, pestilence and famine.”

Sir Wilfred Lawson: “The devil in solution.”

Abraham Lincoln: “A cancer in human society, eating out its vitals and threatening its destruction.”

Robert Hall: “Distilled damnation.”

Lord Chesterfield: “An artist in human slaughter.”

Ruskin: “The most criminal and artistic method of assassination ever invented by the bravos of any age or nation.”

General Pershing: “Drunkenness has killed more men than all of history's wars.”

General Robert E. Lee: “My experience thru life has convinced me that abstinence from spiritous liquors is the best safeguard to morals and health.”

How serious is alcohol as a **drug problem** in Australia?

“Alcohol remains Australia’s major drug problem. Heroin may get the publicity but alcohol does even more damage. About 7,000 people die each year from alcohol-related illnesses whereas the figure for heroin is about 500. This does not include those killed in auto accidents where drink driving was involved. The total cost of drug abuse in Australia is about \$4.5 billion per year, of which \$3.5 billion is due to alcohol.”
(Allan Smith, EIG Ansva Insurance)

The facts prove conclusively that the destructive social impact of the multi-billion-dollar alcohol industry is enough to stop any decent citizen, particularly a loving Christian, from indulging in the poisonous brew. Alcohol is tearing our homes and our society apart.

Conclusion

In closing, let me give a word of personal testimony. When saved at the age of 17, I was, as most teenagers, already intimately familiar with the abuse of alcohol. When I got saved in 1985, I was still drinking booze quite regularly, and occasionally getting very drunk. Upon getting involved in a strong Bible-preaching church, I began to think about the subject of alcohol. As I was not sure if drinking were wrong, I stopped drinking altogether for a short time. Unfortunately, I began to drink “in moderation” soon after because of the influence of worldly Christian friends at the University of Sydney. It was several years until my pastor and godly friends finally convinced me that abstinence is the only option for the spiritual Christian. Several months later I went to Bible college in Crown Point, Indiana. While a student there I became involved with the bus ministry of the First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, where we picked up children, teenagers and adults from Chicago and bussed them to church. As I began to work with the people of Chicago, I learned to hate the filthy liquor traffic. I watched homes crumble as fathers drank their lives away. I saw children go without decent clothes or food because the paycheck went to the local tavern. I tried my best to give hope to youths that were disillusioned with life and were heading down the same destructive path as their drunkard parents. **In every broken home that I can remember, booze was the common denominator of ruin.** You ask me if I can take a drink today? When I remember the wrecked homes of Chicago, and when I consider the damage done to Australia by liquor, I want to smash every bottle of beer, wine and spirits I see. I want to see the pub and bottle shop owners put behind bars where they belong. The liquor trade is built on the foundation of the crumbled lives of those who have fallen into the devilish clutches of alcohol.

It is not enough, Christian, to just abstain from booze. If our country would be salvaged, let us win every soul to Jesus Christ that we can, and let us proclaim to them the good news that our Saviour can deliver men from every vice and evil - including the sin of social drinking.