



ALCOHOL, DRUGS, AND THE CHRISTIAN

Kevin Presley

Welcome to Let the Bible Speak. It's good to be with you today to look into the word of God and see what it teaches about the issues that confront us. Our subject today is in response to one of our viewers who requested that we address the issue of Christians and alcohol. Drinking and now, drug use, are commonplace in our society and it seems an increasing number of those who profess to be Christians are drinking alcohol and arguing for the use of drugs such as marijuana. It's certainly legal for people of a certain age to drink and more states are legalizing the use of certain drugs with many pushing for the lifting of more limits. So, this is not a legal issue. It is also not an issue of Christians imposing a moral standard on non-believers. I am approaching our subject today from the perspective of those who claim to follow Christ. Does the bible teach that it's wrong for people for Christians to consume beverage alcohol and recreationally use drugs? Our scripture reading today will be Ephesians 5:18 where the Apostle Paul wrote: ***"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit."*** We will look at this passage and several others in our study today: "Alcohol, Drugs, And the Christian", after a song from the congregation.

The use of alcohol and even drugs is common in our culture today. Alcohol and mind-altering drugs have been around since near the dawn of time. Most of the stigma that surrounded alcohol and drugs a few generations ago, however, is being removed until it seems most people from all walks of life not only drink but do so openly. Since the young people of the 1960's came of age and have produced even younger generations, attitudes are quickly changing about recreational drug use such as marijuana. According to the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 86-percent of people aged 18 or older say they have consumed alcohol. 70-percent have done so in the past year. When the survey was taken, more than a quarter of all adults in the United States admitted to binge drinking.

Those numbers are easy to believe since you see alcohol being consumed in most social settings today. You don't have to go to a back-alley bar to see people consuming alcohol and to witness the party scene

revolving around alcohol. Even restaurants such as Cracker Barrel and some fast-food restaurants have begun serving it. In fact, the use of alcohol is so common and accepted that you are seen as rather strange if you don't ever imbibe it. Drugs are following a similar trajectory. According to the CDC, in 2019, some 48-million Americans claimed to have used marijuana. We're seeing more states and municipalities loosening restrictions and the sale of it is no longer something taking place in a darkened alley way but in businesses along the highways and byways of these states. You shouldn't doubt that other drugs will be de-stigmatized and even legalized in time. And, of course, we are seeing the epidemic of drug addictions and overdoses, especially when it comes to prescription drugs such as painkillers. We are becoming a society that is either drunk on alcohol or high on drugs and the effects of it filter down through our society and are wreaking havoc on minds, bodies, families, careers, and hopes and dreams.

The bible unequivocally warns of such effects and condemns drunkenness. If a person claims to be Christian and believes it's alright to get drunk or high on drugs, they simply are ignoring what the bible plainly says. In the Old Testament for example we have numerous warnings about drunkenness. Proverbs 20:1 says: "Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise." Proverbs 23:31-32 "Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; [32] At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper." The New Testament even more plainly condemns drunkenness such as in 1 Corinthians 6:10-11 where Paul lists drunkards or (people who become intoxicated) along with several other sins of the flesh and he flatly says that "they which do such things shall NOT inherit the kingdom of God." Now, that's not my opinion; that's the Word of God. Paul says that drunkards (that's the Greek word "methusos" which means to become tipsy or intoxicated according to both Strong and Thayer) who do so without repentance won't be saved. So, a drunkard cannot live a Christian life without repenting of his or her sin and ceasing to become intoxicated. If Paul didn't teach that, he didn't teach anything. So, WHY is drunkenness wrong?

One reason set forth in the scriptures is that it takes a sober mind to serve the Lord and remain in control of one's thoughts, speech, and actions. I want you to listen to a series of passages that exhort and admonish the Christian to maintain a sober mind. Paul, when he reminded the Thessalonian church of the approaching Day of the Lord said in 1 Thessalonians 5:5-9 "You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be **SOBER**, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul is warning them that sobriety was necessary to please the Lord and avoid His judgment. The Greek word that Paul used, which is translated 'sober', is the word "nepho". Vine says it "signifies to be free from the influence of intoxicants." The same word is used in other passages in a similar context. Peter said in 1 Peter 1:13-16, "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

Listen to his dire warning in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be **SOBER**, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." The devil looks for opportunities to work in our lives and lead us into sin and into destruction. I don't know of anything that he has used to get man into more trouble than alcohol. Take a tour of the Old Testament and see how strong drink got some otherwise good men into some serious moral trouble including Noah who became drunk and led his family into sin. There's Lot whose daughter, after they had fled from Sodom's destruction, got her father

drunk and led him to commit incest with her and an evil nation descended from the son that was born to that illicit union. You only need to casually glance at a newspaper or look through the headlines of your daily newsfeed to see all the trouble that alcohol (and drugs) gets men, women, boys, and girls into every single day! Look at the sexual sin, the violence, the terrible accidents that all spring from drunkenness or people who are high on drugs. Drugs and alcohol have destroyed many a life physically, mentally, morally, spiritually until it is incredible to me that any person claiming to follow Christ would not at least agree that drunkenness is sinful and destructive, and a Christian should not be guilty of it. "At the last it bites like a serpent, and it stings like a viper" the wise man said and Peter says that if you want to keep the devil from destroying your soul, you need to remain sober and vigilant.

But the question now is, what about social drinking or what about casual and limited recreational drug use. Can a Christian drink so long as he or she doesn't become intoxicated, or can a person use drugs as long as he or she doesn't become addicted or lose control of his or her actions? Well, we need to ask the question: What is drunkenness according to the bible? Now, for a child of God, that's the standard. It's not what the law of the land says. That doesn't matter. It's not what a breathalyzer test may reveal. Does the word of God tell us what drunkenness is? If so, that should be the standard for a person who is trying to please the Lord.

Let's look at our text again, found in Ephesians 5:18. Paul says: "And do not" (and you don't find a plainer way of stating a command or prohibition in the bible), he says, "DO NOT be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." A Christian, in other words, is not to be under the influence of strong drink but rather under the control and influence of the Spirit. The word "drunk" translates the Greek word that Paul wrote: "methusko". We should note that Paul did not use a word denoting a state or condition, but he used a Greek verb which means, according to W.E. Vine, to "make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb), marking the process of the state to become intoxicated." You see Paul used a verb that refers to an action or a process, not a destination or state. Well, when and how does that process begin? It begins when one starts drinking. The effects of alcohol begin when consumption begins. It's not something that suddenly appears after an extended time of drinking. It is a process that incrementally begins when a person starts drinking and gradually increases from one level to another.

This is one of the reasons that alcohol gets so many people into so many bad situations. It's because it is having a subtle effect on the mind and body: lowering inhibitions; slowing reflexes; dulling the senses; and often relaxing control over one's thoughts, words, and actions. People think that drunkenness is reaching a point that person exhibits extreme effects and totally lose control, but rather drunkenness is a process that is set in motion long before one reaches that point. Even low concentrations of alcohol begin to cause physical and mental changes. According to some experts, within 5-10 minutes of a first drink, changes begin taking place in blood pressure, body temperature, concentration and as the person continues to drink, the process continues to dizziness, vision impairment, decreased coordination, slurred speech, lowered inhibitions, mood swings, to physical sickness, unconsciousness, and can ultimately lead to death. Now, my question is: If drunkenness is a condition, at what point is that condition reached? Shouldn't a Christian who is interested in remaining sober (as the bible commands) avoid the process altogether? Can't we all agree that a person is not intoxicated by alcohol if they haven't taken the first drink.

I know there are many arguments put forth and objections offered to what I have just pointed out. For example, one may ask: "Didn't Jesus turn water into wine, and doesn't the surrounding narrative indicate that it's talking about fermented wine?" My answer is "yes" and "not necessarily." Jesus did

turn water into wine in John 2 but the word wine does not always refer to alcohol. The context must determine that.

There are sixteen words in the Hebrew and Greek scriptures which can be translated “wine” and only one of them refers exclusively to fermented wine. That’s the word “sobe”. All the other words can and often do refer to unfermented grape juice. The word used in John 2:9 to refer to what Jesus miraculously provided is the Greek word “oinos”. That’s the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word “yayin” and both terms are generic for the juice of the grape before it ferments or after it ferments. The bible calls grape juice “wine”. Yes, sometimes those words refer to fermented wine, but not always. In fact, in many places (especially where it is called ‘new wine’) it does NOT refer to alcoholic wine. It can even refer to other products made from grapes. Numbers 6:3-4 as well as Jeremiah 40:10 are just two examples. The context determines which is under consideration.

So, Jesus could have turned water into grape juice or intoxicating wine. Which is it? Now, friend, think about it. Would the Son of God who lived without sin and who came to deliver people from their sins, not tempt them with it, become a glorified bartender at a celebration? We’ve already shown that the word of Christ condemns drunkenness (which is a process). And we are to believe that Jesus provided a party of wedding guest with intoxicating drink? I don’t believe that. Now, when it is said in John 2:10 that usually the best wine is brought out first and then the inferior wine, but Jesus did the opposite can just as easily refer to the senses becoming accustomed to the taste of something as much as it could any intoxicating effect. The first bite of some delectable food is usually the most impressive. The same can easily be said of the drink that Jesus miraculously produced on that occasion. It is dangerous to give license to something that bible so emphatically warns us about by attributing to Jesus something the bible doesn’t necessarily say that He did.

Then there are the qualifications for elders and deacons given in 1 Timothy 3. In verse 3, Paul commands that elders not “be given to wine” and in verse 8, he says that deacons are not to be “given to much wine.” Many allege that Paul is allowing deacons to drink in moderation and placing an even greater restriction on elders. But because Paul uses slightly different phraseology doesn’t necessarily mean that he is applying two different standards. There are different ways of saying the same thing. There are, as we will see in a moment, situations where the use of alcohol is permissible but not for social or recreational reasons. Paul is not allowing the deacons to enjoy a few beers with the boys. Nor is his prohibition for church leaders a license for everyone else in the church. Elders are not to be covetous. Does that mean that the rest of can be? Elders are not to be violent and hot-tempered. Does that mean the rest of us can blow our stack and not have self-control and that be okay with the Lord? Of course not! Paul is simply emphasizing a Christian virtue that we are to make sure our leaders are living according to themselves before we allow them to lead the rest of us.

Now, I mentioned that there are situations where the use of alcohol is permitted. Paul addresses that in his first letter to his young son in the faith, Timothy. In 1 Timothy 5:23 he writes: “No longer drink only water but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.” In calling to mind the physical illnesses Timothy was dealing with, Paul permits him to use “a little wine” in treating his condition. We know that alcohol and other drugs that have effects on the mind and body have long been used to dull pain and to treat various ailments. Paul’s allowance here shows, first, that Timothy did not otherwise use wine. This was an exception being made by Paul. Today, a doctor will prescribe someone suffering from some injury or pain-inducing illness a painkiller. Those pain killers can have mind-altering effects and if used for other purposes can be dangerous. If a person is suffering from the flu or a cold, a doctor might recommend he take a medicine or cough syrup that contains alcohol. That

medicine may ease the symptoms and help the person rest. If a person undergoes surgery, we put him or her under anesthesia. Does that make it right for a person to use pain killers for recreational reasons or to take medicine to enjoy a high or buzz? Of course not! God created those things, and we are allowed to use them for that kind of wholesome purpose. But even then, the greatest of caution must be exercised and we rely on a doctor's prescription and oversight to make sure a person doesn't take too much or become addicted. It certainly is not a license for a Christian to use such substances simply because he or she wants to or to experience some euphoric state and so forth.

So much more can be said but I want to ask you a serious question: Why drink? Do you say, "to have fun", to "loosen up and have a good time?" Well, friend, listen to Peter in 1 Peter 4:3-4 "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. [4] In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you." Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:33 "Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." If you must pick up a glass of alcohol or do some drug to be sociable or have a good time, what crowd are you running with? Why drink? Is it to take away problems? The Christian is to turn to Christ and His word; His forgiveness; His promises; His peace for comfort and direction in life, not a bottle. Christ is a refuge for us in this troubled world, not a glass of alcohol.

My dear friend, I'm not a doctor, biologist, psychologist, sociologist, etc. I do know that a person who does not drink will never become an alcoholic and the same is true with drugs. With all the warnings in God's word, with all the broken lives, wrecked homes, and shattered dreams, should we as Christians be running away from it as opposed to turning to it? There are plenty of other things to drink without reaching for something that has the potential to wreck your life and even condemn your soul. Listen now to Peter in 1 Peter 2:11-12 – "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation."

©2022 BibleWay Media. All rights reserved.

BibleWay Media grants permission to copy this material for personal use. Permission is also granted to distribute this transcript as long as it is reproduced in its entirety, used solely for its original purpose of spreading the gospel, and attribution is given to the author and Let the Bible Speak.