

MAY A BELIEVER CONSUME ALCOHOL?

By Denver Cheddie

Introduction

There are two extremes of which believers need to beware. One, no believer should be an alcoholic. There are numerous passages of scripture that speak against this state, among which are Eph. 5:18; Prov. 20:1; 31:4. Alcohol in excess has a controlling effect on human behavior, a damaging effect on human health and is even the cause of many road fatalities. On the other extreme are believers who are so much in bondage that they would not even eat fruit cakes if the fruits were preserved in alcohol. Is eating fruit cake a hindrance to the Spirit of God? What does the bible say about consuming alcohol?

Jesus Turned Water Into Wine

One of the main passages in this debate is John. 2:1-10 where Jesus turned water into wine. If Jesus made alcoholic wine, then that settles it. Why would he do it if he did not endorse it? Some scholars have suggested that the wine Jesus made was non-alcoholic (if there really is such a thing). They allude to the following custom:

Wedding ceremonies in Jesus' day extended for several days. To avoid having the guests get drunk too early, non-alcoholic wine was served first then later on the alcoholic wine was brought out. The governor of the feast remarked that Jesus had saved the best wine for last, suggesting that he reversed the traditional order by serving the non-alcoholic wine last.

If this were the only scripture which discussed wine, the above "custom" would be easy to accept. But its veracity does falter when compared to Matt. 9:17 and Acts 2:13, 15. In the former verse we see that wine can be placed into two categories – new and old. New wine cannot be placed in old bottles because the process of fermentation would increase the gas pressure causing the brittle old bottles to break. The new wine still had to undergo fermenting, whereas the old wine was fully fermented. Thus old wine is definitely alcoholic.

What about the new wine? On the day of Pentecost, gatherers accused the disciples of being full of new wine (Acts 2:13) suggesting that even new wine had enough alcohol to make one drunk. Now is it possible that they were just being sarcastic i.e. "these men are drunk with grape juice"? It is very unlikely given verse 15. Peter argued that they were not drunk not because new wine was non-alcoholic, but because it was only 9 a.m. The bottom line is that new wine is alcoholic though less strong than old wine. So the difference between the two types of wine is not one of alcoholic versus non-alcoholic, but varying degrees of alcohol content.

What Says Paul?

In 1 Tim. 5:23, Paul actually instructs Timothy to use wine for his stomach. Someone may say that was for medical reasons. Well what has changed since then? Has alcohol suddenly become "unmedical"? Research has shown that alcohol IN MODERATION has various health benefits. The problem really is not the moderate use of alcohol, but the abuse of it. This is

what causes fat bellies, heart problems, spousal abuse and careless driving. Why condemn the fruit of the vine which God caused to grow (Prov. 3:10)? Condemn the alcoholic!

Another important factor which cannot be downplayed is the public testimony of the Christian. Social drinking could hardly be said to be Christian-like in the light of Rom. 14 and 1 Cor. 8. These passages teach that certain things are not wrong of themselves (Rom. 14:14), but if they become a source of offence or a stumbling block to others following Christ, it becomes sin (1 Cor. 8:12). Drinking wine falls into this category (Rom. 14:21). It is not wrong in itself just as eating meat is not wrong. It becomes wrong if it causes others to stumble.

Conclusion

The Bible condemns the abuse of alcohol and drunkenness. It also cautions against social drinking. However it leaves to the discretion of the individual the possibility of consuming alcohol in moderation. It even suggests that there may be health benefits associated with it. Whether the average person is responsible enough to use alcohol in moderation without getting carried away and becoming addicted to it is an entirely different story. However personal indiscretion does not alter the teachings of the Bible.

(c) 2001 Denver Cheddie

All Rights Reserved