

Alcohol

“A Christian Perspective on a Deadly Killer”

By Elder Rick Oliver

Facts about Alcohol

- More than 100,000 U.S. deaths are caused by excessive alcohol consumption each year.
- Nearly 14 million Americans meet diagnostic criteria for alcohol use disorders.
- Traffic crashes are the greatest single cause of death for persons aged 6–33. About 45% of these fatalities are in alcohol-related crashes. 65 people each day die on our highways due to alcohol.
- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse are the third leading cause of the preventable deaths in the United States.
- Currently, approximately 14 million Americans, 1 in every 13 adults, abuse alcohol or are alcoholics.
- Low to moderate doses of alcohol can increase the incidence of a variety of aggressive acts, including domestic violence and child abuse.

Alcohol and Youth Facts

- Alcohol is a leading cause of death among youth, particularly teenagers. It contributes substantially to adolescent motor vehicle crashes, other traumatic injuries, suicide, date rape, and family and school problems.
- Every day, on average, 11,318 American youth (12 to 20 years of age) try alcohol for the first time, compared with 6,488 for marijuana; 2,786 for cocaine; and 386 for heroin.
- Alcohol is by far the most used and abused drug among America’s teenagers. According to a national survey, nearly one third (31.5%) of all high school students reported hazardous drinking (5+ drinks in one setting) during the 30 days preceding the survey.
- Young people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcoholism than those who begin drinking at 21.
- More than 1,700 college students in the U.S. are killed each year—about 4.65 a day—as a result of alcohol-related injuries.

Alcohol is a DRUG!

- Alcohol is a colorless liquid, completely soluble in water, and is one of the oldest drugs of abuse.
- Alcohol is the most commonly used and widely abused psychoactive drug in the world.
- Alcohol is typically produced by the fermentation process of cereals such as barley, corn, and rice.
- This drug produces a sedative effect and acts as a brain depressant.
- Alcohol remains the most frequently used brain depressant in the United States.

Short Term Effects

- Even at low doses, alcohol significantly impairs the judgment and coordination required to drive a car or operate machinery safely. Low to moderate doses of alcohol can also increase the incidence of a variety of aggressive acts, including domestic violence and child abuse.
- Effects of moderate alcohol intake include dizziness and talkativeness. The immediate effects of a larger amount of alcohol include slurred speech, disturbed sleep, nausea, and vomiting.

Long Term Effects

1. Permanent damage to vital organs
2. Several different types of cancer
3. Gastrointestinal irritations, such as nausea, diarrhea, and ulcers
4. Malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies
5. High blood pressure
6. Lowered resistance to disease

Why Christians “Should” Abstain?

1. Alcohol is a deadly killer
2. Even low doses greatly impair ones judgment
3. The Bible condemns the effects and use of alcohol
4. Most church members have promised to abstain through a covenant relationship with their church
5. Jesus refused alcohol & drugs on the cross

Why would Christians want to drink and what does the Bible say?

1. To get a buzz

(Eph 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;)

NASB - Eph 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

2. Relaxation

(Psa 119:165 Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.)

3. Romantic Encounter

(Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;)

4. Social Acceptance

(2 Cor 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,)

Biblical Perspectives on the use of Wine

- In Palestine, the vintage takes place in September, and is celebrated with great rejoicing. The ripe fruit was gathered in baskets, Jer_6:9, as represented in Egyptian paintings, and was carried to the wine-press. It was then placed in the upper one of the two vats or receptacles of which the winepress was formed, and was subjected to the process of "treading".
- A certain amount of juice was exuded from the ripe fruit from its own pressure before treading commenced. This appears to have been kept separate from the rest of the juice, and to have formed the "sweet wine" noticed in Act 2:13. The "treading" was effected by one or more men, according to the size of the vat. They encouraged one another by shouts. Isa 16:9-10; Jer 25:30.
- Their legs and garments were dyed red with the juice. Gen_40:11; Isa_63:2-3. The expressed juice escaped by an aperture into the lower vat, or was at once collected in vessels. A hand-press was occasionally used in Egypt, but we have no notice of such an instrument in the Bible.
- Often it was preserved in its unfermented state and drunk as must or it could be bottled off after fermentation and if it were designed to be kept for some time, a certain amount of lees was added to give it body.
- Isa 25:6 The wine consequently was required to be "refined" or strained previous to being brought to table as the pure unfermented fruit of the vine.

Did Jesus drink alcoholic wine?

- The answer is no. There is no biblical foundation to support this view. Notice some common misconceptions.

The wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11)

- The belief that the wine Christ provided in Cana was alcoholic rests on five major assumptions.
 1. First, it is assumed that the word *oinos* "wine" indicates only "fermented-quality grape drink, i.e. wine."
 2. Second, it is assumed that since the word *oinos* "wine" is used in reference both to the wine which ran out and the wine that Christ made, both wines must have been alcoholic.
 3. Third, it is assumed that the Jews did not know how to prevent the fermentation of grape juice; and since, as argued by William Hendriksen, the season of the wedding was just before Spring Passover (cf. John 2:13), that is, six months after the grape harvest, the wine used at Cana had ample time to ferment.
 4. Fourth, it is assumed that the description given by the master of the banquet to the wine provided by Christ as "the good wine" means a high-quality alcoholic wine.
 5. Fifth, it is assumed that the expression "well drunk" (John 2:10) used by the master of the banquet indicates that the guests were intoxicated because they had been drinking fermented wine. Consequently, the wine Jesus made must also have been fermented.

The meaning of "oinos"

- *Oinos*: Only Fermented Grape Juice? It is widely believed that both in secular and Biblical Greek the word *oinos*, from which derive both the Latin *vinum* and the English *wine*, meant exclusively fermented grape juice.
- However many proof texts, from both secular and religious authors, makes it abundantly clear that the Greek word *oinos*, like the Latin *vinum* and the English *wine*, and the Hebrew word Yayin was used as a generic term to refer either to fermented or unfermented grape juice.

The men of Cana were “well drunk”

- The assumption is that since the Greek word *methusthosin* "well drunk" indicates drunkenness and since drunkenness is caused, according to the statement of the banquet master, by the "good wine" customarily served first, then "the good wine" provided by Christ must also have been intoxicating, because it is compared with the good wine usually served at the beginning of a feast.
- An important consideration is the fact that the Greek verb *methusko* can mean "to drink freely" without any implication of intoxication. And in this sense the verb is plainly used by the LXX (i.e. Septuagint), Gen 43:34; Cant 5:1; The latter meaning is respected by the Revised Standard Version which renders it more accurately "when men have drunk freely." With no evidence to support any intoxicating effects.

Jesus made Good Wine

- In the writings of Alexander the great one of things he desired was the wines of Palestine. Historical writings confirm that these wines were preserved in skins that were prepared in an unfermented must with many unusual recipes and spices such as spiced pomegranate that were added for unique flavors.
- Those who wish to insist that the wine used at Cana was alcoholic and that Jesus also provided alcoholic wine, though of a better quality, are driven to the conclusion that Jesus provided a large additional quantity of intoxicating wine so that the wedding party could continue its reckless indulgence. Such a conclusion destroys the moral integrity of Christ's character.

The false assumption of wine preservation

- NEW SKINS. Anyone familiar with the pressure caused by the gas-producing fermentation knows that no bottle, whether of skin or glass, can withstand such pressure.
- Job knew this when he said: "Behold, my heart is like wine that has no vent; like *new wineskins*, it is ready to burst" (Job 32:19).
- *The only "new wine" which could be stored safely in new wineskins was unfermented must, after it had been filtered or boiled.* The skin would be prepared like the amphora, by smearing it with honey or pitch, and after the must was poured in, it would be tightly closed and sealed.
- The reason that a *new* skin was required for *new* wine is that an old skin would almost inevitably have, as Lees and Burns explain, "some of the decayed albuminous matter adhering to their sides." This would cause the new wine to ferment. On the other hand, if new wineskins were used to store unfermented new wine, no fermentation-causing agents would be present in the skins themselves. Thus, the wine would be preserved from fermentation and the wineskins from rupture.

Fermented Wine

- Contrary to popular opinion, the problems the ancients encountered in preserving fermented wine were as great as, if not actually greater than, those faced in preserving unfermented grape juice. To prevent fermented wine from becoming acid, moldy, or foul-smelling, vintners used a host of preservatives such as salt, sea-water, liquid or solid pitch, boiled-down must, marble dust, lime, sulphur fumes and crushed iris.

Jesus was accused of being a drunkard (Matt 11:19; cf. Luke 7:34)

- Jesus was contrast with John the Baptist who was a wilderness prophet. He neither ate nor drank *with others* and avoided human companionship. John was also slandered and called a crazy man. Our Lord associated freely with others at meals and elsewhere. He too was slandered, called a glutton, and charged with being *oinopotes*, a *drinker* of (intoxicating) wine. There is no proof that he was either. Only a victim of slander by the attacks of the religious leaders of His day.
- Lovers of alcoholic beverages love to affirm that Jesus was a drinking man in order to shelter themselves under the cover of His example. Remember we can justify anything in our own minds but the bible speaks very plainly about this subject.

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

The Early Church practiced abstinence

- In the early Christian Church, it was usual to mix the sacramental wine with water. (The simple wines of antiquity were incomparably less deadly than the stupefying and ardent beverages of our western nations). The wines of antiquity were more like syrups; many of them were not intoxicant; many more intoxicant in a small degree; and all of them, as a rule, taken only when largely diluted with water.
- The way the Apostolic Church understood, preached and practiced the teachings of Jesus and of the Old Testament regarding the use of alcoholic beverages provides a most valuable verification and clarification as to whether Scripture teaches moderation or abstinence. In view of the fundamental importance attached to the witness of the Apostolic Church sufficient evidence can be produced to teach an historical view of abstinence.
- For example, the irony of the mockers' charge that on the day of Pentecost the apostles were drunk on *gleukos*, that is, on the grape juice which apparently was their common beverage (Acts 2:13), provides an indirect but important proof of their abstemious life-style and inferentially of the life-style of their Master. There would have been no point in the mockers' attributing to unfermented grape juice the cause of the disciples' strange actions, if it was not common knowledge that the apostles abstained from intoxicating wine. The intended jibe was that the disciples were such naïve simpletons they got drunk on grape juice!
- Similarly, Paul's reference to drunkenness at the communion table of the Corinthian church (1 Cor 11:21) offers no support for a moderate use of alcoholic wine, for two reasons. First, whatever was done at Corinth was a departure from the instructions Paul had delivered to the church (1 Cor 11:23); thus, the Corinthians' conduct constitutes a warning rather than an example for us. Second, a study of the meaning of the verb

methuo ("satiated") and of the implications of Paul's admonitions, clearly suggests that the problem at Corinth was indulgence in eating rather than intoxication with alcoholic wine.

Conclusion

The tragedy of alcohol abuse is deadly. Christians should promote abstinence and accept the fact that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only physically harmful, but also Biblically and morally wrong. A life that reflects Christ is a life that abstains from the destructive forces of the world.

SOURCES; A PREVIEW OF WINE IN THE BIBLE, Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Andrews University, The laws of fermentation: Patterson, Smiths Bible Dictionary, Substance Abuse: The Nation's Number One Health Problem, Feb. 2001, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Alcohol Health & Research World, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Analysis