A Study Guide on Drinking

***Alcohol has many defenders, but no defense – Abraham Lincoln***

Proverbs 20:1 “Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.”

Let’s start with some statistics:

700,000 people per day receive treatment for alcoholism.1

41% of all traffic accidents alcohol related, in 2006, there were 17,602 fatalities in alcohol-related crashes.2

In the U.S., a death every 30 minutes related to alcohol.3

In the U.S., the average age to begin drinking is 14.4 This is earlier than most parents probably believe it is a problem for children.

Each year, college students spend about $5,500,000,000 ($5.5 Billion – that isn’t a typo) per year on alcohol.5 This is more than on soft Drinks, milk, juice, tea, coffee, and books combined.

Alcohol is involved in 50% of spousal abuse cases, and in one study, 69% of domestic violence cases that ended in murder involved alcohol.6

Alcohol and other drug abuse by a parent or guardian is involved in 7 out of 10 cases of child abuse and neglect; 90 percent of child welfare professionals cite alcohol as the drug of choice in these cases.7

65% of drownings involve alcohol.8

41% of those jailed for violent crimes involved alcohol.9

Without considering the scriptures at all, it should be clear that, at best, it is unwise, destructive and foolish to involve yourself with drinking alcoholic beverages. The world sees clearly that drinking is matched with ungodliness and as a vice. It is governed that way and the world sees it that way.

Would you consider it odd to see members of a local church standing around before or after services and popping open a six pack of beer to have some drinks before going in to worship? What if the preacher set a can of beer on the pulpit while preaching and sipped from it lightly while preaching? Would you feel that was peculiar and contrary to what the preacher or Christians represent? If you are making an argument that social drinking is OK, then all of these things should also be OK – otherwise, what scriptural restriction would you place on it?

For the purposes of this guide, we will assume that drunkenness, or the act of drinking to such excess as to lose all or most capacity for control, is understood as wrong and agreed to be forbidden in the scriptures. Most who argue for social drinking accept that the plain teaching of scripture on drunkenness forbids it completely. For that reason, we won’t spend our time discussing drunkenness, per se.

Concerning drunkenness and drinking in general, the scripture has quite a bit to say, and none of it good:

**Leviticus 10:8-11** “Then the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying: “Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by the hand of Moses”

**Proverbs 20:1** “Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.”

**Proverbs 23:20-21** “Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.”

**Proverbs 23:29-35** “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: “They have struck me, but I was not hurt; they have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?””

**Proverbs 31:4-5** “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted.”

**Isaiah 5:11** “Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may follow intoxicating drink; who continue until night, till wine inflames them!”

**Isaiah 5:22** “Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink,”

**Isaiah 28:7** “But they also have erred through wine, and through intoxicating drink are out of the way;

The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating drink, they are swallowed up by wine,

They are out of the way through intoxicating drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.”

**Hosea 4:11** “Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart.”

**Habakkuk 2:15** “Indeed, because he transgresses by wine, he is a proud man, and he does not stay at home. Because he enlarges his desire as hell, and he is like death, and cannot be satisfied, he gathers to himself all nations and heaps up for himself all peoples.”

**Matthew 24:48-49** “But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards,”

**Galatians 5:21** “envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

**Ephesians 5:17-19** “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,”

**Romans 13:13** “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.”

**I Corinthians 5:11** “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.”

**I Corinthians 6:10** “nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”

**I Peter 5:8** “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

**Titus 2:3** “the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—“

**I Timothy 3:8** “Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,”

There are others, but it should be understood for argument’s sake that one verse condemning drunkenness is enough.

The remainder of this guide will look at the more popular arguments made for “social drinking”, or “moderate drinking”, or “light drinking”. Drinking at a meal, at a wedding, or at a special occasion. These are the arguments made to allow drinking as long as it is “responsible” and “controlled”. It is the experience of the wiser Christian that these arguments are simply made as a placation and a gateway to drunkenness. However, we will still address them here.

**Some Arguments Made FOR Drinking**

*Argument 1: “There is no verse in the New Testament that specifically forbids drinking in moderation”*

In God’s Word, there are many things not specifically condemned – but are wrong because of the principals involved. Heroin, for example, is never specifically condemned in the New Testament. Are we to conclude then, that a Christian should feel free to use heroin recreationally? Of course not.

Many things are forbidden in principle – and that idea is understood when one looks honestly at the scripture.

That aside, the scripture DOES forbid drinking in “moderation”. Drinking in “moderation” is forbidden in every verse that forbids drunkenness.

Let’s start here:

**“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit”**

*Ephesians 5:18 (KJV)*

Let’s break down the verse:

**“…be not drunk” (“methysko”)**

 **“get drunk, become intoxicated” (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich, Greek-English Lexicon 499);**

**“to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process of the state expressed in methuô [intoxicate], to become intoxicated” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of NT Words 343);**

**“to begin to be softened” (Young’s Analytical Concordance 275);**

**“to grow drunk (marking the beginning of methuô)” (E.W. Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon & Concordance to the English & Greek NT 238).**

What stands out in all these definitions is that “drunkenness,” as biblically defined, is not simply what might be considered “full-blown inebriation,” but it describes the very beginning stages of this process that LEADS to drunkenness if continued.

This word here is called “inceptive” – which means it marks the **beginning** of becoming drunk.

Do not begin the process of becoming drunk. Do not begin to be softened with liquor.

Social drinking is condemned in these words.

To focus on the words as they are given and understood in the Greek, it is a good translation here to say,

**“Don’t begin drinking alcohol which brings ungodly behavior, but rather be filled with the Spirit which has the opposite effect.”**

People begin to be drunk when they begin to drink, violating the verses on drunkenness we find in the New Testament.

If you don’t see staggering, or drunkenness – then you aren’t drunk, right? Wrong. Medical science backs this up.

“There is no minimum (blood alcohol concentration) which can be set, at which there will be absolutely no effect” (JAMA, 1960)

Sure, that’s an old reference. Here’s a newer one.

 “Although legal limits for BAC levels have been set in most states, impairment in driving skills can occur with any amount of alcohol in the bloodstream” (JAMA – May 3, 2000)

The University of Oklahoma hosts a website to determine your alcohol impairment (drunkenness ) level.

A 160 pound man drinking a 5 oz glass of wine is about a .05% impairment level (some impairment)

12 oz ***reduced alcohol*** beer - .02%

[www.stopimpaireddriving.org](http://www.stopimpaireddriving.org) – describes what someone may experience at a blood alcohol level of .02 – *“some loss of judgment, relaxation, slight body warmth, altered mood, decline in visual functions (rapid tracking of a moving target), decline in ability to perform two tasks at the same time (divided attention).”*

What is our conclusion? One drink begins the softening process and certainly impairs you by every measure we know to use.

To further illustrate how the New Testament DOES forbid drinking in “moderation”, let’s turn to I Peter 4:3

**“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.”**

*I Peter 4:3 (NKJV)*

Again, let’s look at the words considered:

**“drinking parties” (“potos”)**

**“The idea in the passage is, that it is improper for Christians to meet together for the purpose of drinking – as wine, toasts, etc. It would forbid, therefore, an attendance on all those celebrations in which drinking toasts is understood to be an essential part of the festivities, and all those where hilarity and joyfulness are sought to be produced by the intoxicating bowl. Such are not proper places for Christians.” (Albert Barnes, Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament)**

**“the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium not of necessity excessive, but giving the opportunity for excess.” (Richard Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament)**

*Argument 2: Health benefit. A glass of wine a day is good for your health.*

This argument is based on the premise that “we aren’t drinking because we like getting drunk or the social aspects of it, it is just for good health.

This is based on the concept that wine has a component called resveratrol in it.

**“The AHA doesn’t recommend that you start drinking alcohol just to prevent heart disease. Alcohol can be addictive. Too much increases your risk of high blood pressure, high triglycerides, liver damage, obesity, certain types of cancer, accidents and other problems. In addition even small amounts of alcohol can cause cardiomyopathy – weakened heart muscle – and heart failure in some people.”**

***The Mayo Clinic (March 9, 2007)***

**“There is evidence that drinking red wine may reduce your risk of heart disease. The benefit is most likely due to a substance called resveratrol found in the skin and seeds of grapes – especially dark red and purple grapes.**

**Resveratrol is also found in grape juice – especially juice made from the dark purple concord grapes. Recent studies have suggested that red and purple grape juices may provide the same heart-healthy benefits of red wine.”**

**Both red wine and grape juice also contain antioxidants…, which have been shown to increase your… “good” … cholesterol and lower your risk of clogged arteries…, and may help lower blood pressure.”**

**(Martha Grogan, Mayo Clinic Cardiologist** – ***Does grape juice have the same benefit as red wine?)***

Let’s be honest… This is smoke screen much the same as the “I don’t feel it”, “I only drink one drink”, and “It never has an effect on me.”

*Argument 3 – Paul told Timothy to take wine for his stomach’s sake*

**No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.**

*I Timothy 5:23*

To be clear, this passage is not talking about Timothy partying or having a beer with his buddies. This is what is known as an elliptical statement – NO longer drink water ALONE – BUT – take some wine with it. Remember, the word “wine” does not always necessitate the presence of alcohol – but let’s assume it may have.

Paul had to convince Timothy to drink wine for medicinal benefit! Why did he have to do that? If it had been commonplace amongst first century Christians to drink wine, or the “only way water was purified” as some will incorrectly argue, then, this would have been totally unnecessary. Timothy would ALWAYS have taken a little wine with his water, since it would be the ONLY way it was taken or offered. Clearly that is not the case.

The fact is, even for medical use, Timothy avoided the use of ANY wine. To use this verse to make a case FOR drinking goes directly against what the verse actually says. The verse clearly authorizes the use of wine (in some form) for medicinal purposes. The use of alcohol, painkillers, and the like medicinally and reasonably is not at issue here.

It is probably safe to say that most of us can discern the difference and purpose between Nyquil and a Budweiser.

*Argument 4: In bible times, fermentation could not be prevented – so people MUST have been drinking wine.*

Due to the complexity and scientific nature of this argument, the answer to this in its entirety is located at:

 http://www.cookevillechurch.com/resources/articles/2016/01/07/biblical-wine

*Argument 5: Jesus turned water into wine*

Recall that the word wine does NOT indicate that it was alcoholic. That is imposing our 21st century understanding to a 1st century description.

So – what did Jesus do during this miracle?

The person making this argument must show it was alcoholic. But of course, they can’t.

The context says the opposite. Let’s take a look:

**And he said to him, ‘Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!’”**

*John 2:10*

The word here for “well drunk” means “drunk freely, drunk largely.” This would indicate that they had all they wanted. They had PLENTY of wine. This would have violated plain teaching of the OT and NT on drunkenness.

Here, once again, is an argument used in order to allow “moderate” drinking by using scripture that, if understood to indicate alcoholic wine, would have described binge drinking beyond all levels condemned in the Bible.

If these folks were “well drunk” and had “drunk largely” or “drunk freely” of alcoholic wine, then they would have been simply “drunk” by all accounts.

So, the argument would go, “Although we all agree that drunkenness is sinful, Jesus took a wedding party that had ‘drunk all they wanted’ of alcoholic wine, and then He added another 160 gallons of fine, alcoholic wine for them to drink and, by all accounts, get obliterated. This interpretation of these verses does not teach “moderate” drinking, it would teach wild abandon and binge drinking to dangerous levels. Is that the argument? Clearly this interpretation is condemned by the multitude of verses forbidding drunkenness.

Another indication that this was not alcoholic wine was that the master of the feast also was still able to tell the difference in the quality of the wine. Drunk people, from experience, are not the best judges of much about anything, let alone, the intricacies of wine quality.

*Argument 6: I Timothy 3:8 says deacons cannot be given to MUCH wine. This indicates that they can drink SOME.*

**“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,”**

*I Timothy 3:8*

The understanding here, given the description, is that Deacons can drink SOME wine, as long as it isn’t “MUCH” wine.

So, is this implied consent given for drinking a little alcohol?

First, note: Warnings against excess are NEVER an approval of the practice of the action itself. Consider other passages where this would apply, if so:

If I Peter 4:3-4 only warns against an EXCESS of alcohol in drunkenness, then it would stand to reason that the other things warned about there would also be OK in “moderation.”

**“For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. 4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;”**

*I Peter 4:3-4*

If drunkenness is the only issue here, then would it also be safe to say that “orgies”, “lawless idolatry”, or “flood[s] of debauchery” are OK, as long as they are approached in “moderation”? Of course not.

**“Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?”**

*Ecclesiastes 7:17*

In the same manner, we would read this as saying, “A little wickedness is OK – just so long as you aren’t ‘overly’ wicked.”

Likewise in James:

**“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”**

*James 1:21*

Would one argue that wickedness is OK as long as it is “moderated” before it becomes an “overflow” of wickedness.

That brings us back to the argument: I Timothy 3:8 allegedly indicates that deacons can drink SOME wine as long as they are no given to MUCH wine.

Does this view of the scripture stand up to the same treatment in other places?

Deacons can drink SOME wine, but elders are forbidden drinking at all.

Let’s look at some other similar passages:

**“the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things”**

*Titus 2:3*

Similarly here the passage says that older women should not be given to much wine. So, would this indicate that older women CAN drink in “moderation”, while younger women cannot drink at all?

With deacon’s wives, the same standard would have to be assumed:

**“Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.”**

*I Timothy 3:11*

So, deacons can drink in moderation, yet their wives are to be “temperate” or “sober” in their dealings with alcohol. The meaning of “temperate” or “sober” is the idea of abstinence, not moderation.

Continuing this logic, let’s look at another passage:

**“that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience;”**

*Titus 2:2*

Same word for “sober” here, meaning an abstinence for older men.

Let’s recap, then, and find out who may and may not drink “moderately” and who needs to be completely absent from drinking, according to this logic:



Are we supposed to believe that this should be the guide for Christians in drinking? Nonsense.

Furthermore, most who would use this type of logic would not follow it and forbid younger women and older men “moderate” drinking.

*Argument 8 – Jesus was accused of being a winebibber… this would not have been made if there hadn’t been some reason.*

**“For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’  The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”**

*Luke 7:33-34*

Among the arguments, this one seems to border the most on the illogical and preposterous. The entire point of these verses is to show that those who would accuse John and Jesus were WRONG.

John the Baptist did not have a demon.

The Son of Man was not a glutton and a winebibber.

There is no argument here. Only a vain attempt to paint Jesus in a negative light in order to justify a bad practice.

*Argument 9 – Colossians 2:16 says to let no one judge you in food or drink. Therefore, you can’t judge my choice of drink.*

**“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,”**

*Colossians 2:16*

The entire context of this passage indicates matters of liberty, not of right and wrong.

We can’t judge what a person eats or drinks, right?

These were matters of liberty – not right and wrong. Whether they practice the festivals or not was not condemned here, it was whether they should be judged as HAVING to practice those things since they were of the Law of Moses. Using this argument is dishonest at best. This is clearly no more indicating that we should not use good judgement in alcohol use that it is saying that if a festival included child sacrifice (as some pagan ones did), that we simply can’t be judging each other for that.

There may be other arguments made in order to provide a defense to drinking alcohol in “moderation” or “responsibly”, but over and over, they are met by a clear teaching in the New Testament that we are not to begin the process of becoming drunk. Thus, to try to turn the scripture against itself will never stand as a valid interpretation. Clear teaching shows us otherwise.



As we conclude this guide, here are some thoughts you may want to consider as you find your way on this controversial subject:

Quote from Guy N. Woods (Preacher)

***“Obviously, any man, elder, deacon, preacher, bible school teacher, or other person in the church cannot set the proper example of Christian living who engages in the use, in any degree, of that which has been the occasion of so much sorrow, grief and ruin in the world. Temperance in the use of harmful things, is total abstinence. There is no such thing as a proper moderate use of drugs, alcohol, and other harmful substances.” -*Guy N. Woods, Preacher**

Consider your influence on others (within and without the church).

When a person who is a Christian drinks – even the world sees it as an adult vice.

**“For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”**

*I Corinthians 8:10-13*

**“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

*Matthew 5:16*

With these verses in mind in your mission as a Christian – can you honestly say that it would have no effect on others and that you can perform your mission as a light before men with a beer in your hand?

Christians who try to defend drinking seem to want to keep it in a closet, or hidden only for those select few who are “strong enough” to handle this particular vice.

Ask yourself honestly:

Would you be OK if before services the preacher, elders, mothers holding their babies, and other members of the church were standing out front of the building drinking from water bottles? Picture it: As services started, they drank as much as they could to finish them off, and then proceeded in for worship? I think most of us wouldn’t even give it a thought.

Now replace the water bottles with beer cans. Still don’t give it a thought? Why not? If drinking in moderation is OK, then a single beer before worship is no more wrong than on any other occasion, right? Why is it we would make a distinction in this “authorized” activity? Because we know better. That is why those who would drink keep their activity hidden. If it isn’t wrong, stand up and say so. Bring a six pack to the next potluck with members of the church. Seem right? If not – why doesn’t it?

 **“Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.”**

*Proverbs 20:1*

*References*

1. pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh23-2/069-77.pdf

2. www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810809.pdf

3. National Vital Statistics Reports; 2004;53(5) Available at www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ad/ad332.pdf

4. Newes-Adeyi, G.; Chen, C.M.; Williams, G.D.; and Faden, V.B. NIAAA Surveillance Report No. 74: Trends in Underage Drinking in the United States, 1991–2003. Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2005. Available online at: http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/surveillance74/Underage03.htm. (8) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings. NHSDA Series H–22, DHHS Pub. No. SMA 03–3836. Rockville, MD: SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, 2003. Available online at: <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nhsda/2k2nsduh/Results/2k2Results.htm>.

5. Eigan, Lewis. Alcohol Practices, Policies and Potentials of American Colleges and Universities, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991.

6. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8629754>

7. Millennium Hangover: Keeping score on alcohol,” Drug Strategies, 1999

8. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2141696/>

9. <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ac.pdf>