



Is Social Drinking A Sin?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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Is social drinking a sin? Those who study the Bible will often claim that drunkenness is clearly identified as a sin. For instance, “drunkenness” is identified as being one of the “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-21 that will prevent an individual from going to Heaven. But, these same individuals are often more divided as to whether God permits a casual, social, or recreational use of alcohol – if it does not result in complete drunkenness. Therefore, let’s investigate the Scriptures to see how God answers this question.

It Is Contrary To God’s Wisdom

Let’s begin by simply examining whether God presents social drinking as even being a good idea. Throughout the Scriptures, we have God’s wisdom poured out to us (especially in the book of Proverbs). Thus, when we study the Bible, we are gaining wisdom (if we accept His revelation as being true).

Listen first to Proverbs 20:1. “Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.” The *New International Version* has this verse as, “Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.” Here is a direct statement God has made about the wisdom of intoxicating beverages. Clearly, these produce negative effects on the body. They cause an individual to become inebriated and begin acting in ways they would not act under normal conditions. Particularly, this proverb points to the actions of mocking and violence as a couple of the results from such impairment. Now, here is God’s estimation of these kinds of intoxicating influences: They are “not wise”!

Next, listen to 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?’”

What wisdom is there in using these intoxicating beverages for social or recreational uses? Listen to all of the heartache and devastation that it causes in life! Those who experience such are both those who “linger long at the wine” and those who “go in search of mixed wine.” But, I want you to now consider how God says this problem ought to be remedied. He did not say that it should be handled carefully or used in moderation. Instead, He said that it should not even be looked at so as to present a temptation. Because of its inherent danger (compared to a serpent and viper), God’s wisdom says that it should be avoided.

Our own observations and current medical studies continue to demonstrate that alcohol is both addictive and destructive. It impairs the mental faculties. It slows reflexes. It is a poison for the body that is responsible for many ruined lives and families. So, as an individual contemplates the consumption of these beverages for recreational and social use, he/she should seriously consider the wisdom of being involved with this poison. Romans 12:9 says, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.” Notice that God commands His people to “abhor what is evil.” This means that we must have a horror of everything evil and utterly detest it. Thus, if drunkenness is understood to be evil, this passage implies that alcohol is not something to be enjoyed in moderation. It is something to be afraid of and utterly detested – if you are interested in pleasing God. Furthermore, we must “cling to what is good.” Since (as we will see) soberness is entirely good and approved of God, we must get as close to it as we possibly can. Thus, social drinking is contrary to the wisdom of God.

It Is Contrary To Being Filled With God’s Spirit

Not only does God’s book teach us that social drinking is “not wise,” but it also teaches us that social drinking runs contrary to being filled with God’s Spirit. Consider Ephesians 5:18. “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” In Ephesians 5, Paul is describing the kind of transformed life those who are Christians are expected to live. In verse 15, Paul instructed that Christians “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” So, those who are Christians are expected to be circumspect (very careful and diligent) in the way they live, making sure that they are walking according to God’s wisdom – not contrary to it. Thus, the wisdom (or lack thereof) of consuming alcoholic beverages is a very real issue for the Christian who desires to live in a diligent and careful way to please God.

Then, verse 18 directly addresses the matter of Christians using intoxicating beverages. The Greek word translated “drunk” can be defined as to be intoxicated or to be made drunk. So, it is not just the final outcome of all-out drunkenness that must be avoided. Those who are Christians are not even to begin the intoxicating process (a process that begins with the first drink). Paul says that this intoxication is “dissipation.” That is, it is self-indulgent, not responsible, and foolish! Furthermore, Paul says those who are Christians should be “filled with the Spirit.” To be “filled with the Spirit” is to be filled with God’s word and to be focused on living according to His instructions. Now, if we are to be “filled” with God’s Spirit, how much can we be filled with intoxicating beverages? By implication, these two are set in contrast with one another. Whenever we take of one, it detracts from the other. So, each drink of intoxicating beverages we take, the less we are filled with God’s Spirit.

In connection with Ephesians 5:18, please consider what Paul taught about Christians being filled with God’s Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” Now, consider that since God’s Spirit dwells in the Christian (in the way already identified), this makes the Christian’s body God’s temple

and it should be used only in a way that will glorify God. Therefore, we must consider the question: Does God permit His temple to become intoxicated to any degree? Does the consumption of alcohol for social and recreational purposes in any amount bring glory to God? No, it does not!

It Is Contrary To The “New Man”

Not only is social drinking contrary to being filled with God’s Spirit and contrary to His wisdom, but it is also contrary to the “new man” the Christian ought to be. This was partially reflected in Ephesians 5 (which depicts some of the character of the new man). Certainly, the Bible teaches that Christians are expected to be transformed in their character, putting to death the old ways of sin and putting on the new ways of righteousness.

Consider 1 Peter 4:3-4 concerning this transformation. “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. 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.” Notice that those who had become Christians had wasted enough of their lives living for sin. Now, those who are Christians are different – and those who knew them previously see that there is a difference.

Specifically, though, I want you to observe the three words that are relative to our question. Peter identifies “drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties” among the things associated with the old man of sin and should not be associated with the new man of righteousness. These three words all are applicable to the consumption of intoxicating beverages and cover the subject from first drink to full-blown drunkenness. “Drunkenness” refers to the condition of complete intoxication (full-blown drunkenness). “Revelries” refers to a half-drunken condition, connected with noisy partying. And, “drinking parties” refers certainly to any lesser form of social drinking. So, Peter directly identifies social drinking as being something that was part of the old man who was involved in sin rather than the new man who is focused on righteous living.

Thus, as Peter describes, those who were associated with the Christian prior to his/her conversion will notice that the Christian no longer engages in those sinful practices. The Christian now has his/her focus on living according to God’s holiness and is determined not to be conformed to the ways of this world (Romans 12:1-2)! Galatians 5:16-26 further states that the Christian is focused on living according to God’s ways rather than pursuing his/her own physical desires. Therefore, such things as drunkenness, revelries, and “the like” (anything similar) are no longer part of the Christian’s life. Certainly, this also includes social drinking (as Peter has identified).

It Is Contrary To Soberness

Not only is social drinking contrary to the “new man” who is focused on living righteously, contrary to being filled with God’s Spirit, and contrary to God’s wisdom, but it is also contrary to soberness. Soberness is the state of being sound in mind. It is being in full control of one’s own mental faculties. So, the question we need to consider is whether God approves of people consuming a beverage that negatively influences the soundness of one’s mind from the very first drink – for social and recreational purposes?

Listen to 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.’”

The language of girding up “the loins of your mind” has reference to those who wore loose, flowing robes (as was typical in the time this was written). They would gather the ends of their robes into their belts in order to move more freely to work, run, etc. The idea was that girding up their loins prepared them for the proper actions that needed to be taken. Similarly, those who are Christians must always have their minds prepared for the appropriate actions. The mind of the Christian must be “sober.” That is, he/she must be properly controlled and collected so as to respond to situations in the appropriate ways. And, this passage also indicates that the Christian must not be conformed to the ways of sin he/she practiced prior to becoming a Christian. Instead, he/she must live a life that is entirely patterned after God’s holiness.

1 Peter 5:8-9 is also helpful on this point. The Christian is instructed, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith...” Once again, the Christian must be in full control of his/her mental faculties. This is particularly important whenever the Christian realizes that there is an enemy in the devil (Satan) who is working to deceive and lead him/her away from following God. This one must be resisted. Therefore, how can the Christian possibly justify the willful intoxication of his/her mind – even if it is only done in “moderation”? Surely, the Christian should desire to be in full control of his/her faculties and not be willing to impair them at all!

Conclusion

With social drinking being contrary to the wisdom of God, contrary to being filled with the Spirit, contrary to the new man, and contrary to God’s command to be sober, we can safely conclude that social drinking is, in fact, sinful. Remember, it is directly condemned in 1 Peter 4:3-4. God wants his people to be focused fully on following Him and resisting the one who desires to destroy their souls. Using alcohol (in any amount) for social and recreational purposes surely does not help us accomplish that goal – and God has given no authority for it!

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