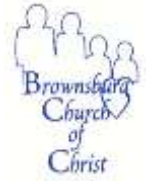




Alcohol and the Bible

Brownsburg Church of Christ
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Introduction:

In May 2005, Brad Paisley released a popular single that made it to #4 on the Billboard Hot Country Songs. The song was simply titled "Alcohol." For those who have not heard the song, do not be too quick to berate it. It actually has a very interesting story to tell. Note some of the lyrics.

I can make anybody pretty
I can make you believe any lie.
I can make you pick a fight with somebody twice your
size. Well, I've been known to cause a few break-
ups,
An' I've been known to cause a few births.
Well, I can make you new friends, or get you fired from
work.

And since the day I left Milwaukee,
Lynchburg an' Bordeaux, France,
Been making the bars lots of big money,
An' helpin' white people dance.
I got you in trouble in high school,

But college, now that was a ball,
You had some of the best times you'll never remember
with me: Alcohol.

I got blamed at your wedding reception,
for your best man's embarrassing speech.

...
And I'll bet you a drink or two, that I can make you put
that lampshade on your head.

Cause since the day I left...
I been making a fool out of folks just like you
...I am medicine and I am poison
...

Not exactly a flattering picture of intoxicating drink is it? I don't really know what Paisley's thoughts on drinking alcohol are. I am certain, however, that the majority of fans who sent this song to the top of the charts did not see how serious it is. They view this picture of intoxicating drink as funny. However, I am amazed by the absolute honesty with which this song discussed the impact of alcohol. Since this song climbed the charts, brethren have continued their arguments about Christians drinking intoxicating drinks. What is sad is the number of Christians who make silly comments like, "I am not affected by a few drinks." "The Bible teaches us to do all things in moderation" (I am still looking for that verse). "If you can't hold your alcohol you shouldn't drink, but those of us who can are allowed to drink some as long as we don't get really drunk." Considering all of the things I have heard Christians and religious people say in defense of intoxicating drinks and then this song by Paisley, I am reminded once again that the people of the world are sometimes more honest than the religious when it comes to these kinds of issues. After all, the people of the world, not feeling they have to defend alcohol, don't care how it affects them and are, therefore, more honest about how it affects them. I believe it is time for a little honesty about how intoxicating drink affects us and about what the Bible actually says. There are lots of things we could say about intoxicating drink, but in this lesson, I want us to perform some simple and honest Bible study. Let's take a look at the **Proverbs**. For some reason, many Christians go to **Proverbs** to try to defend drinking intoxicating drinks. But I'm not sure they are being completely honest with what **Proverbs** actually says. In that book, three passages play a part in our consideration of intoxicating drink and whether or not we should partake—**Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4-7**. We will ask three questions from these passages. 1) What is intoxicating drink? 2) What does it do? 3) What should we do with it?

Discussion:

- I. What is intoxicating drink?
 - A. **Proverbs 20:1** gives God's definition of intoxicating wine and strong drink. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler..." (ESV).
 1. The term translated "Mocker" is the Hebrew "luwts." According to Strong's Enhanced Lexicon it means "to scorn, make mouths at, talk arrogantly." The term translated "brawler" is the Hebrew "hamah." It means "to murmur, growl, roar, cry aloud, mourn, rage, sound, make noise, tumult, be clamorous, be disquieted, be loud, be moved, be troubled, be in an uproar." Please be careful to note that this verse does not say this is what intoxicating drinks cause people to do; this is what intoxicating drink is by nature. Granted, because it is these things, it will cause people to do them.
 2. To get a true picture of the importance of these definitions, look at what the Proverbialist says about mockers and brawlers.

- a. “Mocker”—According to **Proverbs 3:34**, God scoffs at the scoffers. God is not impressed with mocking or scoffing. According to **Proverbs 14:6**, the scoffer or mocker seeks wisdom but gets none. According to **Proverbs 19:29**, condemnation is prepared for the mocker. According to **Proverbs 24:9**, scoffing and mocking is an abomination to men.
 - b. “Brawler”—This word is used three other times in **Proverbs**. In **Proverbs 1:21**, it describes the “noisy streets” in which wisdom cries out but receives no hearers. Then in **Proverbs 7:11** and **9:13**, it describes a harlot who is also a “brawler,” that is, boisterous.
3. The point is that wine is a mocker because it speaks great swelling words that promise a great deal, but it is lying. It knows it and it laughs at you as you listen to its arrogant babbling. It is a brawler because it is boisterous and stubborn. It yells, hollers, and clamors but does not provide any benefit.
- B. **Proverbs 20:1** goes on to say “and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (ESV). The New American Standard translation says “And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.” This has led some to believe that **Proverbs 20:1** is only talking about drinking a lot of intoxicating drink. Consider the many other translations that support what the English Standard says. The KJV says, “whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” The ASV says, “whosoever erreth thereby is not wise.” The RSV says, “whoever is led astray by it is not wise.” The NIV says, “whoever is led astray by them is not wise.” Thus, this last half of the verse does not say anything about levels of intoxication or amounts of drinking. It simply points out that not only is intoxicating drink a mocker and a brawler, it is also a deceiver that leads people astray. How many people are deceived by this mocking, scoffing, brawling, boisterous, and stubborn drink? We have to have these kinds of lessons repeatedly because so many are deceived. If we are deceived by the empty and arrogant words of intoxicating drink, then we are fools.

II. What does it do?

- A. **Proverbs 23:31** explains that intoxicating drink sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. Let’s face it, intoxicating drink is enticing and inviting. Isn’t that why the beer commercials used to tell us, “It doesn’t get any better than this”? It seems good. However, remember what we have learned already from **Proverbs 20:1**. Intoxicating drink is a mocking, brawling deceiver. It invites and entices and promises much. It is wonderful to look at. It is great to taste. However, according to **Proverbs 23:32**, once it enters the stomach it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Am I the only one who is reminded of the scene in the Garden when the serpent convinced Eve that the forbidden fruit was good for food, a delight to the eyes and desirable to make one wise (**Genesis 3:6**).
- B. Read all of **Proverbs 23:29-35**. Intoxicating drink causes woe, sorrow, contentions, complaining wounds and redness of the eyes (may refer to bloodshot eyes, some suggest the concept of blurred vision). This is the goal of intoxicating drink, yet some suggest we can walk a little way down the path of this mocker. Intoxicating drink will cause you see strange things and utter perverse things (have you ever heard of putting on your beer goggles?). Intoxicating drink causes you to be like a person who lies down in the middle of the sea. What do you know about a person who is lying in the midst of the sea—they are drowning. According to Deane and Taswell in the Pulpit commentary, the Germans had a saying, “More are drowned in the wine-cup than in the ocean” (*Pulpit Commentary*, “Proverbs”, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1950, p 383.) It also makes you like one who lies down at the top of the mast. Have you seen the top of a mast? You couldn’t stand at the top of the mast, let alone lay on it. Especially if the boat is rocking on the ocean. Intoxicating drink is a danger. I wonder if Brad Paisley read these verses before writing his song. He said alcohol can make anybody look pretty, make you believe lies, make you pick fights with people twice your size, get you fired, make you a fool, get you in trouble. Granted it says you can have a ball with it, but you won’t remember most of it. For another popular look from an honest country musician, consider Neil McCoy’s song (out about the same time as Paisley’s “Alcohol”), “Billy’s Got His Beer Goggles On.” Billy is trying to drown his sorrows. He chases everything in sight because “he can’t see ugly through bloodshot eyes.” “Right now his worries are gone” but “He’ll fall apart when he gets home.” Alcohol is great stuff, isn’t it?
- C. Also, according to **Proverbs 23:35** it is addictive. What else could cause all of this but cause a person to wake up and want some more. I will never forget some of my high school buddies who came to school almost every Monday complaining about spending Sundays puking and how they will never drink again.
- D. **Proverbs 31:5** says intoxicating drink will cause a person to forget God’s law. Intoxicating drink immediately impacts your ability to think clearly. It attacks your logic, your reason, your judgment, and your inhibitions. That is why **Proverbs 23:33** said the drinker utters perverse things. This is the true danger of intoxicating drink. The real issue is not about your health. The real issue is not about whether you look like a

fool. The issue is that with every drink you take your ability to control yourself is hindered—beginning with the very first one. This was Paul’s point in **Ephesians 5:18**. The word for “drunk” in that passage is “methusko.” Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says this word is “an inceptive verb, marking the process of the state expressed in [methuo].” “Methuo” signifies being drunk. **Ephesians 5:18** is not condemning being stone-cold drunk. It explains that every step you take down the path of being intoxicated with alcohol prevents you that much more from being controlled by the Holy Spirit, that is, from being able to make your judgments based on the word of the Holy Spirit (**cf. Colossians 3:16**). (See endnote for more information on this term.ⁱ)

III. What should we do with it?

- A. **Proverbs 31:6-7** provides the only passage that is remotely permissive for drinking intoxicating drinks. The person who is dying and in great pain may drink to remove the pain. Despite how so many want to read this passage, the text does not describe a depressed person who is trying to drown his sorrows. It speaks of a person in pain and misery because he is dying. Thus, we find permission to use alcohol medicinally as a pain killer. Everyone else needs to consider what the rest of these passages in **Proverbs** say.
- B. According to **Proverbs 20:1**, we recognize that we must not let it deceive us. It is going to promise all kinds of wonderful things. Don’t buy it. Its end is misery and death. Do not allow it to deceive you into saying that only a little won’t matter. That is a lie from the devil.
- C. **Proverbs 31:4-5** says, “...it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink” (ESV). We as Christians are a “royal priesthood” (**I Peter 2:9**). We are kings and it is not for us to desire or drink intoxicating drinks, because with every drink it takes away our ability to control ourselves.
- D. Interestingly, I have heard numerous Christians turn to **Proverbs 23:29-35** and explain that this is what happens to those who drink too much. After all the passage does say it happens to “those who tarry long over wine” (ESV). However, notice it also says it happens to “those who go to try mixed wine (**vs. 30**, ESV). What amazes me is that some Christians today read this passage and teach that what it means is we should only drink a little bit in moderation. I’m not sure how they come to that conclusion in the face of the Proverbialist’s actual instruction on what we should do with this intoxicating drink that causes all these problems. He said, “Do not look at wine...” Did he mean that as we drink a little bit of it in moderation we should keep our eyes closed? Or did he mean we need to stay away from it and not even look at it, lest the deceiving drink tempt us to partake?
- E. Consider an interesting connection of passages. Remember that wine is a mocker or scoffer (**Proverbs 20:1**). Further it causes contentions (**Proverbs 23:29**). Interestingly, **Proverbs 22:10** says if we drive out the scoffer we will get rid of contentions. It did not say just put up with the scoffer in small doses of moderation, but drive out the scoffer. (This corresponds with another interesting connection. The New Testament counterpart to “brawler” in **Proverbs 20:1** is found in **Ephesians 4:31**, in which Paul taught us to “Let all...clamor...be put away from you” [ESV].)

Conclusion:

Now that we have looked more closely at these passages from **Proverbs**, you tell me what the Christian’s relationship to intoxicating drink ought to be. Should it be one of moderation ? Or should it be one of abstinence and absolute sobriety? The answer is clear. Do not even look on intoxicating drink, let alone drink it, lest you drink and neglect God’s law, losing your soul.

ⁱ 1) Webster’s Dictionary defines “inceptive” as “expressing the beginning of the action indicated by the underlying verb, ...” 2) Abbot-Smith’s Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament claims “methusko” is “causal of [methuo]” (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, Scotland. 1973, p 282.). 3) Bullinger’s A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament says “methusko” means “to grow drunk (marking the beginning of No. 1 [methuo])” (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids. 1978. p 238.).