

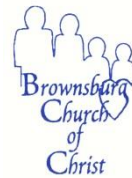
# Common Questions about Intoxicating Drink

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## Introduction:

One of the continuing and ongoing debates among Christians these days has to do with alcohol. Is it right? Is it wrong? What about moderation? If we just have a social drink now and then or to calm our nerves at night, is that alright? Many of you will remember other lessons I've preached on this subject in which I take a pretty strict line that God doesn't want us drinking intoxicants. **Proverbs 23:31** seems pretty clear to me. When all is said and done, the Proverbialist tells us not to even look at the stuff, let alone drink it. Further, the positive command to be sober found in passages like **I Thessalonians 5:6-8** seems to me to rule out intoxicants in the lives of Christians. Finally, the teaching in **Ephesians 5:15-21** teaches that to the degree we imbibe intoxicants we limit the ability of the Spirit to fill us. Why would we want to limit the room for the Holy Spirit in us by putting other spirits in us? Yet, there are numerous questions that come up about this. We'll cover this material over two lessons, but I hope to answer some of the common questions that come up about this topic. I know Christians differ and I ask you not to dismiss what I'm going to say. Please have patience with me. When I'm done, if you think I've missed something, please feel free to discuss it with me.

## Discussion:

- I. "How can we say drinking wine is a sin if the Bible discusses drinking wine positively?"
  - A. **Psalms 104:14-15** says, "You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart" (ESV). Verses like this seem to be the end of the matter for some people. Wine is spoken of positively. We Christians must be allowed some at least in moderation. However, we must learn that the Bible uses the word "wine" differently than we do.
  - B. In our modern day, the word "wine" equals fermented, intoxicating juice (usually from a grape). The Bible, however, uses the word very much like we use the word "cocktail." By itself, "cocktail" simply means a mixed drink. We have to rely on the context of the conversation to know if the cocktail is intoxicating or not. Ordering a cocktail at a local restaurant typically means an intoxicating drink. However, the commercial I saw with little kids drinking Welch's juice cocktail drinks was simply about mixed juices like Welch's "Cran-Apple" juice or "Cran-Grape" juice.
  - C. Certainly, passages like **Proverbs 23:29-31** refer to intoxicating wine. However, there are passages that speak of wine which clearly cannot be intoxicating. Consider **Jeremiah 40:10-12**. This passage talks about gathering in the wine along with the other summer fruit. This means the wine is still in the grape. It cannot possibly be fermented and intoxicating. (Consider also **Isaiah 16:10**; **Jeremiah 48:33**). Just because a passage demonstrates drinking wine in a positive light, doesn't mean it is viewing intoxicating wine in a positive light. We have to examine the context to know for sure that it is intoxicating wine.
  - D. You may do your own search. But in my searches, there is only one passage that is clearly intoxicating wine that even remotely demonstrates drinking intoxicating wine in a positive light. That is **Proverbs 31:4-6**. There, wine and strong drink are to be given to the perishing who are in bitter pain. That corresponds with what we have already admitted. Intoxicating drinks may be used for medicinal purposes like pain killers. However, note in that passage that it is not for kings to drink or even desire intoxicating drinks. Remember, we are kings. We are a royal priesthood (**I Peter 2:9**). (By the way, priests have never been allowed to drink intoxicating wine while performing priestly duties—**Leviticus 10:9**).
  - E. One more comment in this regard. Someone might suggest that **Psalms 104:14-15** must refer to intoxicating drink because it is making the heart glad. Are we to believe that having a glad heart means being a little tipsy? Consider just a few passages that mention having a glad heart—**Psalms 16:7-9**; **Proverbs 27:9, 11**.
- II. "How could the ancient people keep the juice from fermenting?"
  - A. The ancient people were not as simple as we might think. We are often arrogant enough to believe that simple processes like preserving juice in an unfermented state have only become possible because of our modern brain power. However, let us keep in mind that the ancients accomplished feats we still wonder how they did—e.g. Stonehenge, pyramids, etc.

B. Consider the following quotes from ancient literature.

1. "If you wish to have must (i.e., grape juice) all year put grape juice in an amphora and seal the cork with pitch: sink it in a fishpond. After 30 days take it out. It will be grape juice for a whole year." (*De Agri Cultura CXX*, Marcus Porcius Cato the elder who lived from 234-149 B.C.; quoted from *Sipping Saints* by Rick Lanning and also *The Bible, The Saint, and The Liquor Industry* by Jim McGuigan). Thus juice could be kept from fermenting if sealed and kept below a certain temperature which immobilizes the yeast from fermenting.
2. Pliny who lived from AD 61-113 said, "The most useful wine has all its force or strength broken by the filter." And Plutarch who lived from AD 46-120 said, "Wine is rendered old or feeble in strength when it is frequently filtered. The strength or spirit being thus excluded, the wine neither inflames the brain nor infests the mind and the passions, and is much more pleasant to drink" (From the same sources as above). This filtering referred to a process by which the yeast would be removed and thus not allow fermentation.
3. Have you heard someone who argues vehemently against consuming alcohol claim it is lawful to cook with? Of course. Why? Because the alcohol cooks out. Alcohol has a lower boiling point than water. When boiled, the alcohol in fermented wine will cook out just as it cooks out of the vanilla you add to your cake recipes. Virgil who lived from 70 to 19 BC wrote, "Meanwhile his spouse, ... over the fire boils down the liquor of the luscious must, and skims with leaves the tide of the trembling cauldron" (quoted from *The Bible, The Saint, and The Liquor Industry*, p 45). After the wine was boiled down, it became pasty and thick like honey. It was a concentrate and to be drunk it had to be mixed with water.

III. "Didn't Jesus turn water to wine in Cana for those who were already drunk on wine?"

- A. Jesus' first miracle is recorded in **John 2:1-12**. This is the proof text passage for most religious people who want to drink intoxicating drinks. However, this passage falls far short of authorizing such. Actually, if this passage is involving intoxicating drink, it takes us farther than we all admit we are allowed to go.
- B. Let's assume the supporters of intoxicating drink are correct. This wedding feast was a whole bunch of people who were already drunk on intoxicating wine. Jesus then made some more for them (some suggest what Jesus made was not intoxicating but what the people had already drunk was). That picture has Jesus violating **1 Peter 4:3**, which claims drinking parties are sinful. Finally, can any of us honestly believe Jesus gave more intoxicating drink to people who were already drunk? We all believe being drunk is a sin (**Galatians 5:21**). Was Jesus helping these people further into their sin? That is simply untenable.
- C. If this passage is a picture of Jesus being at a wedding feast full of drunkenness and Jesus giving more intoxicating drink to these drinkers, then what right do we have to stop at saying intoxicating drink in moderation is all that is allowed? If Jesus could give more alcohol to drunkards, why can't we? If He could do it for them, why not us? The reality is, either this is simply an issue of Jesus providing more unfermented wine to those who were not drunk or it calls into question whether or not drunkenness is really sinful.

IV. "Didn't Jesus drink so much wine He was accused of being a drunkard?"

- A. In **Matthew 11:19** (paralleled in **Luke 7:34**), Jesus rebuked the people for their fickle nature. John the Baptist came into the world. He was extremely ascetic. He would not eat bread or drink wine. Rather, he ate locusts and wild honey (**Matthew 3:4**). Many people refused to follow John and claimed he had a demon because He was so austere. Jesus, on the other hand, ate bread and drank wine. Many refused to follow Him claiming He was a glutton and winebibber (NASU says "drunkard"). Interestingly, according to Vine's Expository dictionary, the word translated "winebibber" in the KJV and "drunkard" in the NASU literally means simply "wine drinker."
- B. Back up and remember what we have already learned. Just because the Bible uses the word "wine" doesn't necessarily mean it is referring to fermented, intoxicating drink. We must logically accept that just because the Bible speaks of someone drinking wine, it does not necessarily mean they are drinking intoxicating wine. Finally, just because the Bible talks about someone drinking a lot of wine does not mean they are drinking a lot of intoxicating wine. These are all assumptions we make. We too often assume that any passage condemning heavy drinking of wine must be condemning drunkenness. The Bible condemns heavy eating of meat as gluttony, but that has nothing to do with being intoxicated. Why then would we be shocked that the Bible would couple with that heavy drinking of wine that was not intoxicating? Consider **Ecclesiastes 10:16-19**. The point corresponds with the modern maxim, "We should eat to live, not live to eat."

- C. The fact that some accused Jesus of being a heavy drinker of wine did not necessarily mean they were accusing Him of being a drunk any more than accusing Him of eating too much bread meant they were accusing Him of being a drunk. We have to come to grips with the fact that when it comes to food and drink, God does not just condemn drunkenness. He condemns not controlling our physical appetites period, whether it has to do with intoxicating drink or non-intoxicating food and drinks. Finally, just because the people accused Jesus, does not mean Jesus was guilty. Jesus was neither a glutton nor a heavy drinker of wine. He was in control of His physical appetites.

V. "Didn't Jesus talk about putting new wine into old wineskins? Why would He use that as an illustration if intoxicating drinks were sinful?"

- A. In **Matthew 9:17** (paralleled in **Mark 2:22** and **Luke 5:37-38**), Jesus explained that His disciples did not fast while He was present because it was just inappropriate at that time. I am afraid that too many have tried to force huge allegorical meanings on these illustrations when it seems Jesus was simply illustrating the point that forcing His disciples to fast while He was with them was as inappropriate as having the attendants of the bridegroom mourn in the bridegroom's presence, putting unshrunk cloth on old garments, or putting new wine into old wineskins.
- B. The first point we need to make is that just because Jesus used something to illustrate a principle, does not mean it is authorized. Consider the parable of the unrighteous manager in **Luke 16:1-13**. Jesus used this unrighteous manager as an example of a principle on how to use money in this life. Does that mean Jesus was giving us authority to be unrighteous in stewardship? Of course not. This alone demonstrates that the wineskin illustration does not authorize intoxicants. However, I believe there is more to this little story than meets the eye.
- C. The reason this passage is used is typically to say that our Bible friends could simply not keep the wine from fermenting. They could not put the new wine into old wineskins because the old wineskins would be dried and brittle. As the wine fermented, which produces a great amount of gas, the old wineskin could not stretch in order to accommodate the gas production. The old wineskin would burst. If the wine is fermenting, that is certainly true. Then we are told that the new wineskin would not be so dry and could stretch. But is that really true? The reality is that the amount of gas produced during fermentation is so great most wineskins, whether new or old, would burst if the wine inside them fermented. If the wine was going to ferment, the only way to keep the wineskin from bursting was to put vents in the neck of the wineskin to release the gas. In that case, it would not matter if the wineskin was new or old. What we gather is that the wine put in new wineskins was not expected to ferment. In an old wineskin, that has been opened and emptied, the yeast left behind from the already drunk juice will be activated by the contact with air. When new wine is poured into it, the yeast will start the fermentation process despite the fact that it is sealed up. However, a new wineskin has no activated yeast in it. The wine could be put in the new wineskin and sealed off and preserved so that the wine would not ferment, would not produce gas, and would not burst. Understanding this, we see that this illustration, far from providing authority for drinking intoxicating drinks, actually demonstrates that the people understood how to keep their juice from fermenting.

VI. "Didn't Paul tell Timothy to drink wine in **I Timothy 5:23**?"

- A. He most certainly did. The first thing we must notice is that there is nothing in this passage that demonstrates Paul was talking about intoxicating wine. We can make all kinds of suppositions about this wine and why Timothy had to be encouraged to drink it, but nothing in the text proves it was intoxicating.
- B. However, if we grant that it was intoxicating, as most do, then all we have demonstrated is what we have already conceded. We are allowed to drink intoxicating drinks for medicinal purposes.

VII. "Why does Paul tell Timothy not to appoint men who are 'addicted to wine' (NASB) as elders, but deacons are not to be 'addicted to much wine' (NASB, ESV) in their qualifications in **I Timothy 3**?"

- A. **I Timothy 3:3, 8** and **Titus 1:7** have been used by many to supposedly authorize intoxicating drink in moderation. It has been used in various ways, none of which authorizes intoxicating drink at any level.
- B. Allow me to begin discussing these passages by giving you some food for thought.
  - 1. Why do we assume this is referring to intoxicating wine? I believe we only assume this because of our modern debate regarding alcohol. We have an automatic assumption that if a passage speaks of drinking a lot of wine or being given to it, it must mean alcohol and it must mean being a drunk. But, if we remove our colored glasses and look at this passage again without that biased approach, we may learn a much greater point. Remember **Ecclesiastes 10:16-19**. That passage talked about a king who knew

the appropriate time to eat and drink. He understood that eating was for strength and not for drunkenness. I know that passage uses the word “drunkenness” but since when does eating ever make anybody drunk. This passage points out that a land needs a king who “eats to live and does not live to eat.” A land needs a king who eats for strength and not just for enjoyment. A land needs a king who can control his physical passions. Otherwise he will spend his time fulfilling his desires, allowing the kingdom to suffer.

2. I believe the qualifications for elders and deacons are similar. I think it is far stricter than claiming the elder or deacon cannot be drunks. It is saying the elder is to be a person who can control his physical appetites. He eats and drinks to live, he does not live to eat and drink. However, I must admit that few will accept my explanation of this passage. So let’s assume I am mistaken. Let’s assume Paul is talking about intoxicating drink and see if it authorizes moderate drinking of intoxicating beverages.
- C. The first argument made is that since elders and deacons are forbidden to be addicted to wine or much wine, then it is alright for others to drink some wine. The logic behind this is if these actions were restricted for all Christians, why would Paul need to restrict it for elders and deacons? Let me make two points.
  1. First, if restricting this action for the elders and deacons means all other Christians are allowed, it not only authorizes moderate drinking, but alcoholic addiction for everyone but elders and deacons. We know that cannot be true and, in fact, all agree that is not. Drunkenness is sin (**Galatians 5:21**).
  2. Second, if restricting something from the elders and deacons means that it is authorized for everyone else, that means not only can the rest of us be addicted to wine, we can also be intemperate, imprudent, not respectable, not hospitable, pugnacious, fond of sordid gain, have bad reputations, and be filled with the love of money. Most of the qualifications for elders and deacons are simply a rehearsal of what it means to be a good Christian.
- D. The second argument made is that since this restricts being addicted to wine or addicted to much wine, then obviously, even the elder and deacon are allowed to drink intoxicating drinks in moderation as long as they are not given to them. Consider another of the qualifications of the elders and deacons. They are not to be fond of sordid gain (NASU) or greedy for filthy lucre (KJV). By the same logic that supposedly allows the elders and deacons intoxicating drink in moderation we can also allow elders and deacons a little bit of sordid gain or filthy lucre, so long as they are not excessively fond or greedy for it. By the way, this same logic would mean drunkenness, so long as it was occasional and not the result of being addicted to intoxicants would be authorized for the elders and deacons.
- E. The third argument, and by far the most sophisticated, makes a big deal out of the difference of exact wording between the qualification for elders and that of deacons. In our English translations the elder is not to be “given to wine” (KJV) or not “addicted to wine” (NASU). The deacon, however, is not to be “given to *much* wine” (KJV) or not “addicted to *much* wine” (NASU). We are to believe this differentiation demonstrates two levels of drinking intoxicating wine. Elders are given the stricter limitation, presumably because of their great authority. Deacons cannot be addicted to a whole lot of intoxicating wine, but are allowed to be addicted to some wine. Elders on the other hand are not allowed to be addicted to any wine. Does that make sense to you? Where would the line be drawn between being given or addicted to some wine and given or addicted to much wine? Further, doesn’t being given to wine imply much of it? Far from establishing two distinct levels of addiction, Paul is simply saying the same thing in two different ways. Given to wine and given to much wine are six one and half a dozen the other.

#### VIII. “But didn’t Paul say drinking wine was a matter of Christian liberty in **Romans 14:21**?”

- A. In **Romans 14:21**, Paul says, “It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble” (ESV). Some therefore claim drinking intoxicating wine in moderation is obviously lawful just like eating meats. Often, the person who brings up this verse will also be proud to claim he is the “big” brother whose understanding is true and strong. Because of his spirituality, he will not drink or encourage others to drink because so many have conscience against it. But at the same time, he will not judge the drinker. Are we to believe such spirituality is commendable? I do not.
- B. First, we must be very careful as we examine this chapter. We do not know the situational context in which the person would not eat meat or drink wine. **Romans 14** does not explain it. We often supply the context ourselves. We think about Jewish laws of unclean meats or possibly meats offered in pagan sacrifices. We, however, do not know why some would refuse to eat meats or drink this wine. Therefore, we have no idea if this is about abstaining from intoxicating wine, all wine, wine offered as drink offerings. We simply know there was some situation in which some brethren could not in good conscience drink wine, just like there was some situation in which some brethren could not eat meat in good conscience.

- C. With that in mind, from what verse in **Romans 14** would we discern Paul to be speaking of intoxicating wine? One replies, "Well it is obviously intoxicating because no one has a problem with drinking something that doesn't intoxicate." Are you sure? Someone had a problem with eating meats and that had nothing to do with intoxication. Perhaps some were thinking about the Nazirite vows (**Numbers 6:3**) or some about the Rechabites who refused to drink wine (**Jeremiah 35**). Perhaps this had something to do with wine used in pagan drink offerings. Perhaps it had something to do with the same Jewish background that caused Daniel to abstain from wine in **Daniel 1**. If we are going to use **Romans 14:21** to support drinking intoxicants, we have to admit we are basing our opinion on what we don't know. We are assuming what is to be proven. We simply cannot use this verse as evidence that intoxicants were authorized.

IX. "But what if I can hold my liquor and it does not impair my judgment?"

- A. Let me first address this holding your liquor issue. How did you learn to "hold your liquor"? Was it by drinking more and more and gaining a tolerance? What we are to assume from this is that since you have already spent some time sinning and drinking too much, now you have gained a tolerance that those of us who have never drunk before do not have. It is alright for you to drink where it would not be for us because of your past sins. That makes no sense to me. Interestingly on some of the websites I researched before preaching this lesson, one of the questions asked to help a person determine if they may be addicted or an alcoholic was whether or not they had a high tolerance to the effects of alcohol.
- B. Consider **Ephesians 5:18** and **I Thessalonians 5:7**. The term for "drunk" in these passages does not refer to the end result of drinking too much. It refers to the process from beginning to end. Someone says, "But I do not intend on getting drunk therefore I never started the process." This word says nothing about your intentions. It only speaks of the action of getting drunk. When does that process begin? It begins with the first drink. It does not matter how tolerant you are to the effects of intoxicating drinks. Once you have taken that first drink you have started a condemned process.
- C. Also, remember the commands of God found in **I Thessalonians 5:6-8**; **I Peter 1:13**; **5:8**. We are commanded to be sober. I would like to share with you the advice of the Channing L. Bete Co. to teenagers in a pamphlet that the Mental Health Mental Retardation of Southeast Texas makes available. It is entitled What Every Teenager Should Know About Alcohol. Be aware, pp 4-5 of this pamphlet claim you will do one of three things with alcohol: 1) Not use it, 2) Use it safely or 3) Abuse it. This pamphlet supports drinking in moderation as safe drinking. Once again we will notice the honesty of those who do not feel the need to defend their drinking stance. Page 6 of this pamphlet tells teenagers, "It takes 1 hour for the alcohol from one drink (12 oz. of beer, 5 oz. of wine, a 1 ½ oz. 'shot' of 80 proof whiskey or mixed drink) to leave the body. So a 150-180 lb. person could consume 1 drink per hour and still stay relatively sober" (emphasis mine – ELC). In other words, compared to the guy who has drunk two or three drinks in that same hour I could be considered sober. However, if I am only relatively sober, then I am also relatively intoxicated. That is, in comparison to the one who did not drink any that hour, I can be considered drunk. So, if God's command were to stay relatively sober, we might be allowed to have one drink per hour. But that wasn't God's command. His command was to be sober, period.
- D. Despite all of this, the constant plea from the moderate drinker is, "I am not getting drunk. I won't get drunk. And what little I drink doesn't impair my judgment." Here is the problem. The very first thing that alcohol begins to attack is your judgment. If you are drinking, you are the very last person who is in any state to tell how much the drink is affecting you. Here is my question. For those who actually do want permission to drink moderately, why? The most common answer I get is they just want something to help them relax. How can they suggest that the alcohol they are drinking is not affecting them, when the only reason they are drinking it is for the affect it has of relaxing them? The relaxation comes as the alcohol enters your bloodstream and brain and starts depressing your brain's ability to work. The more relaxed you get, the less control you are having. You cannot have it both ways, claiming you are not affected but then saying you want to drink it moderately for how it affects you.

**Conclusion:**

Sadly, too often when we have this discussion it devolves into an argument about rules and lines. I'd like to encourage you again to consider **Ephesians 5:18**. Paul's point is liquid spirits hinder our ability to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Do you want to be led by the Holy Spirit? Then please, don't submit to this increasingly vogue idea that you can imbibe in liquid spirits/intoxicants. Put them away. And if you find you can't, then perhaps there is more of a problem than you realize. Please, don't be filled with spirits, be filled with The Spirit.