

ALCOHOL AND THE BIBLE

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Alcohol in the 90's

Over 10 million Americans, 10% of all adult drinkers, are estimated to be alcoholic. One family in three is estimated to be affected in some way by a drinking problem. The Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences estimates that each year alcoholism and alcohol abuse in the United States cost society from \$40 to \$60 billion, due to lost production, health and medical care, motor vehicle accidents, violent crime, and social programs that respond to alcohol problems. Others have estimated costs to be \$100 billion per year. In the United States, 97,000 deaths annually are related to excessive drinking. One-half of all traffic fatalities and one-third of all traffic injuries are related to the abuse of alcohol. One-third of all suicides and one-third of all mental health disorders are estimated to be associated with serious alcohol abuse. And the toll doesn't limit itself to adults. It has been estimated that there are over 3 million problem drinkers between the ages of 14 and 17 in the United States.[\[1\]](#)

Clearly, alcohol has had a devastating effect on society in general and millions of unfortunate families in particular. Consequently, it is not surprising that many people, Christian and non-Christian, take strong stands against alcohol. Consider the following quotes taken from a recent sermon:

- Alcohol . . . has [left] a trail of blood across America today.
- Alcohol is defiling our nation.

Many Christian denominations prohibit or discourage the use of alcohol altogether, and those which don't proscribe its use caution against drunkenness. The Bible has 17 warnings against the abuse of wine and strong drink and 19 examples of its abuse. Churches are cautioned in 3 epistles not to select leaders who are "given to drunkenness" or "given to much wine."

Culture or Scripture?

This preponderance of evidence has been sufficient for many people to conclude that the use of alcohol is a sin. The assumption is frequently made that the Bible supports such a position. Which leads us to the question, is a prohibitionist stance,[\[2\]](#) a scriptural position or a cultural preference?

It is often difficult for people, both in and outside of the church, to discern what practices are scriptural and what practices are cultural. However, the distinction is an important one. We are directed to reject cultural (worldly) standards for scriptural standards of behavior. [\[3\]](#) Jesus was critical of the Pharisees for multiplying rules and requirements for people to follow,[\[4\]](#) while setting an even more exacting standard for the believer. [\[5\]](#) We should attempt to stay on the path of righteousness and avoid falling into the ditch on either side, neither imposing cultural mores as scriptural mandates, nor dismissing scriptural principles in favor of cultural preferences.

For example, there is no warning in the Bible against dancing, but several denominations teach strongly against dancing. Is this censure a scriptural principle or a cultural preference? Many who teach that dancing is inherently evil would claim their position to be scriptural. However, the case is not easily made. It is much more likely that this aversion to dancing is a cultural preference. Opposition to dancing on cultural grounds is not a problem, as long as it is not presented as a scriptural principle or Biblical imperative.

On the other hand, there are numerous passages in the Bible which speak against adultery, Exodus 20 being the most popular. Many argue that Biblical standards of sexual morality are not relevant to modern society. This case is not easily made, either. There is no expiration date on the Ten Commandments. As one preacher said, the new morality is just the old immorality. Conservative Christians have rightly opposed the re-classification of adultery as a cultural preference. The Bible is very clear on this issue.

But, enough about sex and dancing. This inquiry focuses on alcohol. Christianity seems to be schizophrenic when it comes to alcohol. Despite the documented evidence of the damage alcohol has inflicted on society, some segments consider moderate use of alcohol to be completely acceptable while others consider any use of alcohol whatsoever to be sinful. The question presents itself: which position is scriptural and which is cultural? Or perhaps both are cultural and there is a third scriptural position.

In answering this question, our primary focus of inquiry will be the Bible itself. We will look at all the references to wine and strong drink in the Bible and we will examine the life of Jesus. We will also look at the common arguments that arise in a discussion on this topic. All quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

Analysis of Scriptural References to Alcohol

A search of the Bible (using KJV and the New International Version) reveals 228 references to wine and 19 references to strong drink. The following table is an attempt to organize these references into categories in order of frequency. [A complete list of all the verses](#) has also been compiled (105KB).

Category	Wine	Strong Drink
Use accepted as normal part of culture	58	1
Symbolic (The wine of his wrath, etc.)	32	1
Wine called a blessing from God	27	0
Use in offerings and sacrifices	24	1
Loss of wine an example of a curse from God	19	1
Examples of abuse of alcohol	16	3
Vows of abstinence	15	6
Warnings against abuse	13	4
Gifts between people	9	0

Comparisons (x is better than wine)	5	0
False accusations of drunkenness	3	1
Rules for selecting deacons	3	0
Miscellaneous	3	1
Abstinence in deference to weak consciences	1	0
Total	228	19

The 247 references to wine and strong drink in the Bible can be divided into 3 broad categories: positive references, negative references, and neutral references. We will first summarize these categories and then examine them in detail.

Summary of references to wine in Scripture

On the negative side, there are 17 warnings against abusing alcohol, 19 examples of people abusing alcohol, 3 references to selecting leaders, and one verse advocating abstinence if drinking will cause a brother to stumble. Total negative references: 40, or 16%.

On the positive side, there are 59 references to the commonly accepted practice of drinking wine (and strong drink) with meals, 27 references to the abundance of wine as an example of God's blessing, 20 references to the loss of wine and strong drink as an example of God's curse, 25 references to the use of wine in offerings and sacrifices, 9 references to wine being used as a gift, and 5 metaphorical references to wine as a basis for a favorable comparison. Total positive references: 145, or 59%.

In what could be considered neutral references, there are 33 symbolic references ("the wine of His wrath," etc.), 21 references to vows of abstinence, 4 references to people falsely accused of being drunk, and 4 references which don't seem to fit a category. Total neutral references: 62, or 25%.

Positive references to wine in Scripture

Surprisingly, by far the most numerous type of references to wine in the Bible (58 references, 24%) are casual references to wine as an integral, commonly accepted part of the culture. No value judgement is attached to it, anymore than people in our culture would attach a value judgement to a choice of iced tea or Diet Coke with a meal. These references show that in the minds of the writers of the Bible, no stigma was associated with casual use of alcohol. Nowhere, in these references or elsewhere, is it even remotely suggested that it is considered a sin.

Almost as many times (47 references, 19%) an abundance of wine is used as an example of God's blessing and a lack of wine is used as an example of God's curse. In these references, wine is included along with with milk, wheat, corn, children, oil, sheep, cattle, fowl, rain, silver, and gold as blessings that come from God. Note that silver and gold are included on this list of examples of blessings from God, even though Paul says, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." [\[6\]](#) This seems to indicate that it is not money itself which is evil, but rather that the evil comes from the behavior of those who have elevated money beyond its proper position. We will address the application of this principle to wine later.

There are 25 references (11%) to instructions or examples of the use of wine in offerings and sacrifices. These references seem to establish conclusively that the Bible does not consider wine to be inherently evil, otherwise how could it be used in sacred rituals? Coupled with the fact that Jesus himself chose wine as an essential part of communion, we are forced to conclude that representing alcohol as inherently evil is not a scriptural position.

And finally, nine times wine is mentioned as a gift (along with things like bread, cattle, and sheep) and five times in the Song of Solomon it is used as a basis for favorable comparisons, such as "thy love is better than wine."

Neutral references to wine in Scripture

The verses in this category don't seem to contain any particular positive or negative connotation. They don't characterize wine as being good, but neither do they contain warnings about the dangers posed by wine.

There are 32 symbolic references to wine, used primarily in reference to acts of God^[7] or human behavior that is similar to the effects of wine. ^[8] Most of them could be used as examples of the prevalence of the everyday use of wine, since symbolism frequently draws from familiar images, but it seems more appropriate to consider them as neutral.

The 21 references to vows of abstinence can be separated into two categories: partial abstinence and total abstinence. The Levitical priests were prohibited from drinking wine before going into the temple to perform their duties. However, it is clear that they weren't required to abstain completely since offerings of wine were included along with grain and other goods to financially support the priesthood.

By contrast, the Nazarite vow included a vow of total abstinence from wine and strong drink, along with other signs of being set apart, such as not cutting the hair. This vow was taken by few people and was certainly not something expected of the average person. The other example of total abstinence is the sons of Jonadab, who made a vow to their father that they would never drink wine. Jeremiah attempted to persuade them to drink wine, but they remained true to their vow. According to the commentaries, the sons of Jonadab were used by Jeremiah as an example of faithfulness, a quality which the nation of Israel had lost.

In summary, the vows of abstinence recorded in the Bible were special cases that did not apply to the general population. They are included in the neutral category because abstaining from alcohol for the sake of a vow does not imply that the common use of alcohol is a sin, any more than a vow to not cut the hair implies that cutting hair is a sin.

There are four references to people falsely accused of being drunk: three for Hannah and one at Pentecost. These could possibly be considered negative references, but since there are so few their placement is not important. There are also four references that don't seem to fit a category at all. This number is also too small to significantly affect the outcome.

Negative references to wine in Scripture

All but one of the 40 negative references to alcohol in the Bible concern the abuse of alcohol. There are 17 warnings against abusing alcohol, 19 examples of people abusing alcohol, and three guidelines for selecting leaders. The 3 references to selecting leaders caution that those who abuse alcohol should not be selected as leaders. They use the phrases "not given to much wine," "not given to drunkenness," and "not given to wine." These references indicate that total abstinence is not required or expected of leaders. [\[9\]](#)

Based on the content and number of positive references to alcohol and these 39 negative references, it seems that the scriptural position is an emphasis on moderate use of alcohol with a caution against drunkenness. In light of what the Bible actually says about alcohol, it is surprising that so many conservative Christians treat a prohibitionist position as a scriptural position. However, before we reach any final conclusions we must give full consideration to the remaining reference to wine.

The weaker brother

The remaining reference to wine has to do with the weaker brother or a weak conscience. Before we discover the Biblical definition of a weak conscience, answer the following question: How would you define a weak conscience? Or perhaps: Describe the behavior of a person who has a weak conscience.

In the Bible we find an interesting (and perhaps surprising) relationship between conscience and legalism. The references to people whose conscience is not working properly describe, not people who fail to realize they are sinning, but people who think they (or others) are sinning when they aren't.

In reference to eating meat sacrificed to idols, Paul says:

Eat anything sold in the market without raising questions of conscience, for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake  the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should you be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? 1 Corinthians 25-30.

The man who has problems with his conscience is the one who is worried about eating the meat, not the one who realized there is no sin in eating the meat.

Romans uses the term weak faith rather than weak conscience, but the principle is the same.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. Romans 14:1-2

Verses 3 through 4 caution each of the men not to condemn the other, good advice for us all to remember.

In perhaps the most severe passage, Paul tells Timothy that people whose consciences have been seared will abandon the teaching of the faith and start to teach a legalistic abstinence.

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:1-4.

Titus also contains a scathing passage on this topic.

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. Titus 1:15

So we find that the weaker brother is the one who sees prohibitions where God has not placed them. Legalism is actually the result of a **weak** conscience, not a strong conscience developed from spiritual maturity. With that interesting detour, let's return to the remaining reference to wine.

It is better not to *.*

It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. Romans 14:21.

What is to be said of this scripture? It is in the Bible and is as valid as any of the other 246 verses that refer to alcohol. It cannot be ignored or avoided on the grounds that 246 to 1 are great odds. It must be faced squarely and all implications duly considered. Our goal here is to find truth, not to justify a particular bias toward a specific conclusion.

This verse is divided into two parts: 1) a list of things that should be avoided and 2) why they should be avoided. Let's take the second half first.

"That will cause your brother to fall." If we take a look at the context of this verse, we discover that causing a brother to fall does not mean causing him to drink wine. It means to cause him to violate his conscience by imitating an action that he believes in his heart is wrong. [\[10\]](#) If a weaker brother thinks that drinking wine is a sin, but he sees us drinking wine and decides to drink some himself, still believing in his heart that it is sin, according to this chapter we have caused him to stumble. This is what the verse says we must not do.

It must be noted that some people have taken this verse in the King James version, which uses the word "offended," [\[11\]](#) and have interpreted offend to mean "an insult or affront". Based on this interpretation, which is not supported by the context, they have used this verse to say "If you know I am opposed to any use of alcohol and you drink alcohol in spite of that, you have offended me in violation of Romans 14:21." However, an honest reading of the entire chapter makes it clear that verse 21 doesn't say that we have offended a brother if a self-righteous Pharisee feels insulted that we would transgress his/her legalistic concept of Christian behavior. We have offended our brother only if we

cause him to violate his conscience by imitating actions he believes in his heart are wrong.

However, the most prevalent interpretation of this verse is more reasonable, frequently using a scenario similar to: Christian A picks up a six-pack of beer in the store and buys it. Christian B sees A in the checkout line with the beer. Christian B has been taught from his youth that beer is the drink of the Devil and to drink it under any circumstances is sin. However, he is emboldened by the example of Christian A to buy some himself and drink it, even though he is still convinced in his heart that what he was taught at his mother's knee is true, that drinking beer for any reason is a sin.

Many prohibitionists advance this scenario as the type of situation Romans 14:21 is talking about. They conclude that a responsible implementation of the verse is never to buy or drink alcohol on the off chance that a weaker brother might imitate and consequently violate his conscience. But, before we consider the matter settled, let's examine the verse further to see if this interpretation is reasonable. There are three specific actions we are told to avoid if they would cause our brother to stumble. They are:

1. eat meat
2. drink wine
3. anything else

Not much in the way of maneuvering room in this verse, is there? If it isn't covered in #1 or #2, then #3 wraps it up quite neatly. Let's go back and pick up the list at the top, addressing the eating of meat which we have thus far skipped over in our inquiry on alcohol.

It is the doctrine of the Seventh Day Adventist church that eating meat is wrong. Many people don't agree with this doctrine of the SDA church, but the Adventist denomination is still considered a Christian denomination. Therefore we must consider the Adventists our brothers. According to the interpretation of Romans 14:21 we are currently considering, if there is a chance that an Adventist will see us at McDonalds wolfing down a Big Mac and think in his heart, "Hey, sure it's a sin, but just one can't hurt," and get one himself, we have caused him to stumble. There doesn't seem to be any way around this conclusion if we are going to honestly apply this verse in a consistent fashion.

This application of the verse poses a problem for those who take the Bible seriously. If we truly believe this interpretation to be the accurate one in reference to wine, we are faced with the mandate of turning to a completely vegetarian diet in order to avoid causing a brother to stumble.

Let's consider #3, doing "anything else that will cause your brother to stumble." Some denominations believe that watching plays and movies, **any** kind of drama, regardless of rating, is a sin. Will we all agree to never attend a movie or play again, and to watch only the news and educational programs that don't involve dramatizations on the television? If not, what happens when someone who believes it is a sin decides to attend a movie because he saw us doing it? Some denominations believe it is a sin to wear makeup. Will we all agree to forgo makeup? Some denominations believe it is a sin for women to cut their hair or wear jeans. Will we all conform to this regulation on the off chance that we might be imitated by someone who really thinks she shouldn't? What about wearing shorts, mixed bathing, wearing jewelry, buying anything on Sunday, playing cards, playing dominos, listening to James Taylor, using Celtic words for bodily functions instead of Latin words, the list goes on and on.

As we can see, practically every part of our culture which we take for granted is considered a sin by some segment of Christianity. But it is unlikely that those who insist that the proper implementation of Romans 14:21 is total abstinence from alcohol are willing to alter any other aspect of their behavior in deference to weaker brothers who have problems with things they do every day.

This interpretation of Romans 14:21 seems almost impossible to apply consistently. Perhaps we should search for a more reasonable interpretation, that if you **know** some one who believes something is wrong but is tempted to do it anyway, you should abstain for the sake of that person. Otherwise, we would have to live in constant apprehension that some completely innocent action might be imitated by a complete stranger and thus find us in violation of this verse.

Analysis of Scripture: Conclusions

After consideration of this final verse in reference to wine, it still seems that the scriptural position is an emphasis on moderate use of alcohol with a caution against drunkenness. One wonders how so many conservative Christians came to treat a prohibitionist position as a scriptural position. Now that we have summarized the references to wine in the Bible, let's turn our attention to those references in the life of Jesus.

The Example of Jesus

The ultimate role model for the Christian is Christ, himself. [\[12\]](#) At no time should a Christian feel uncomfortable following the example of Jesus. When a doctrine develops that causes us to ignore or even repudiate the example of Jesus, or to imply that Christians cannot use the behavior of Jesus as a reliable guide, it is time to question the doctrine. In connection with our current inquiry, it cannot be ignored that several of the references to wine in the Bible involve Jesus. To suggest that any use of wine is a sin would be to suggest that Jesus sinned. This fact is so obvious that it cannot be ignored by even the most ardent prohibitionists. However, other "facts" have sprung up to deal with this problem.

Was it really wine?

The most popular "fact" presented in defense of this seeming contradiction is that the wine of the Bible was non-alcoholic. In other words, the contention is that when the Bible says "wine" it really means "grape juice." If this were the case, why the 17 warnings against drunkenness and the abuse of wine in the Bible? How did the partakers of the Lord's table at the church of Corinth get drunk on grape juice? Why would Paul say, "Be not drunk with wine?"

Others say that it may have been alcoholic, but the alcoholic content was so low that it doesn't compare with the wine of today. The same questions apply to this revised "fact." Whatever the alcoholic content of the wine of Bible times, it was at a sufficient level for there to be a need for warnings against drunkenness. And what of the 20 references in the Bible to people actually getting drunk? The only reasonable conclusion is that when the Bible says "wine" then that is exactly what it means.

The Wedding at Cana

With the problem of taxonomy settled, let's proceed to the first mention of Jesus in connection with wine, John 2:1-11. The scene is a wedding celebration. The party has been drinking wine to the point that the host has completely run out and is on the verge of being embarrassed. From a comment made later in the account, we know that the guests have not restricted themselves to a few discrete sips in a toast to the bride. It is clear that they have been doing some serious celebration because they have reached the point where they will not recognize the difference between a good wine and an indifferent wine. In other words, they are at least tipsy. It is under these conditions that Mary asks Jesus to do something about the problem.

Before we examine Jesus' response, consider for a moment the response of a prohibitionist in this predicament. First, it is doubtful that he would be at a wedding reception where wine was flowing freely. Second, it is doubtful that he would stay if the drinking was as concerted as is indicated in the story. But if he did, what would be his probable response when asked to provide more wine for already tipsy guests? It is unlikely that he would agree to replenish the supply, by means natural or supernatural.

Jesus, however, not only replenished the supply, he made an additional 120 to 180 gallons! [\[13\]](#) Not only does this behavior contradict everything we have ever heard from prohibitionists, it causes us to re-evaluate the conventional understanding of the proper limit of drinking. [\[14\]](#)

Jesus a Drunkard?

The second reference to wine in connection with Jesus comes in the form of a false accusation from Pharisees, recorded in Luke 7:33. Jesus maintains that the Pharisees wouldn't be satisfied regardless of what he did. John the Baptist had evidently taken a vow of abstinence and they had accused him of having a demon. Jesus evidently took no such vow, but ate and drank openly and freely, so they accused him of being a glutton and a drunkard. If Jesus was a prohibitionist, the charge of being a drunkard would have been too ridiculous for such astute twisters of the truth as the Pharisees to have advanced. Jesus evidently drank wine to the extent that his enemies thought they could discredit him by spreading rumors that he was a drunkard.

The Lord's Supper

The third reference to wine in connection with Jesus is the sacrament he instituted during Passover, the Lord's Supper, as recorded in Matthew 26:27, Mark 14:23, and Luke 22:17. In all three references, the word wine is not mentioned. Instead it says, "He took the cup." Because the occasion was the Passover, we know that the cup contained wine. If use of wine were truly sinful it is unlikely Jesus would have used it as a foundational and ongoing ritual of the New Covenant.

The Example of Jesus: Conclusion

In summary, we have examined three references to wine in the life of Jesus. We discovered that the ultimate role model for the Christian did not condemn the use of wine in celebration, that he evidently drank wine as a regular part of meals, that he had little regard for the criticism of the legalistic religious leaders of his day, and that he made wine a primary symbol in the New Covenant.

These verses from the life of Jesus reinforce the impression gleaned from the 247 references to alcohol found throughout the Bible. There can be little question that the scriptural position on alcohol is an emphasis on moderate use of alcohol. Considering the life and example of Jesus, it becomes even more puzzling why so many conservative Christians came to treat a prohibitionist position as a scriptural position. Before we conclude our examination of this topic, let's consider other points raised by many prohibitionists.

Alcohol and the Conservative Christian Sub-culture

Most advocates of a prohibitionist position are found in conservative Christian denominations. In these denominations it is not uncommon to hear sermons against any drinking, usually accompanied by statistics like the ones that opened this inquiry. The tragedy of these statistics remains, regardless of the analysis of the Biblical position. It could be these statistics that lead many prohibitionists to grope for justification in imposing as a Biblical mandate what has been discovered to be a cultural preference.

But, things are different now.

Some maintain that alcohol is causing much more damage to modern society than ever before, that technology has allowed the effects of alcohol to become vastly more destructive than in Biblical times. Because of this increase in social damage, they argue that total abstinence is the only responsible position. First, we must admit that this justification does not remove the position from the realm of the cultural to the realm of the scriptural. In addition, this claim raises an obvious question. Where is the evidence that shows that a smaller percentage of the population abused alcohol in Biblical times? It is doubtful that such evidence is available or even exists at all. It is quite likely that such claims are no more than assumptions.

More importantly, this is a dangerous argument because it opens the door to relativism. It goes back to the question of scriptural vs. cultural principles. Sin is a moral entity, not a cultural one. The final arbiter for the definition of sin is the Word of God, not personal reaction to the excesses of our society. Most conservative Christians would agree with the statement that if something was a sin in Jerusalem 30 AD, it is a sin now. In fact, they use this position to oppose attempts to rewrite the Word of God to accommodate cultural decadence. Some people want to eliminate sins from the list due to cultural changes, seeking to legitimize adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and other sins by claiming that the Bible is not relevant to modern social mores. Conservative Christians have rightfully resisted these attempts.

However, if we truly believe that sin is moral, not cultural, then not only must we resist the temptation to drop our favorite sins from the list, we must also resist the temptation to add our current cultural problems to the list. We must admit that the converse of our axiom is also true: if something is a sin now, it was a sin in Jerusalem 30 AD. Since the Bible doesn't suggest that all use of alcohol was a sin during Biblical times, how can it be now? Adding sins to the list is strongly discouraged in the New Testament. [\[15\]](#) Jesus was much more critical of religious people adding prohibitions to the burden of the common man than he was of sinners. He never called prostitutes, adulterers, or drunkards 'vipers'.

Other social problems.

Some maintain that almost by default our culture abuses alcohol instead of using it in a responsible manner, and that the resulting tragic problems in our society justify treating a cultural prohibition as if it were a scriptural position. This logic does not seem to be compelling, but let's give it a look. We can examine some other modern social problems and see what would happen if we applied this same tactic. As was mentioned earlier,[\[16\]](#) money is listed (along with children and wine and other things) as a blessing from God, even though Paul said, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." [\[17\]](#) Certainly our culture abuses money and that abuse causes countless tragic problems in our society. However, we don't respond to the abuse of money in our society by preaching total abstinence from money. Instead, we teach scriptural principles for the responsible use of money.

The abuse of sex in this current culture causes enormous social problems. The statistics are overwhelming, with 25% of children in the U.S. born out of wedlock. The incidence of sexually transmitted diseases has reached epidemic proportions. AIDS is currently killing 6,000 per year. Homosexuals are demanding special rights. However, we don't demand a total ban on sex of any kind. To the contrary, we teach scriptural principles of responsible sexual behavior.

So, we see that in the cases of money and sex, the church maintains a scriptural position. Perhaps the time has come for the church to return to an equally mature and reasonable approach in its teaching on alcohol. Some would question the efficacy of a dogmatic prohibitionist stance. Who is the audience of such an appeal? Non-Christians who don't have cultural taboos against responsible use of alcohol will view it as another example of the attempt of "those religious fanatics" to control the lives of other people. Christians with a broader view of the scriptural position on alcohol will dismiss it as legalistic nonsense generated by the spiritual descendants of the Pharisees. Christians with a prohibitionist position will agree. Ultimately, it seems that such a stance is little more than preaching to the choir.

Alcohol and the Bible: Conclusion

What is the Biblical teaching on the use of alcohol? That was the question we sought to answer in this inquiry. Based on the 247 references to wine and strong drink in the Bible, based on the life of Jesus, and in light of the common arguments that arise in a discussion on this topic, we find a simple (and, perhaps to some, surprising) answer. The Bible has several warnings against drunkenness, but only one caution against the responsible use of alcohol in celebration and with meals. That caution is to be careful, when you are in fellowship with Christians with a weaker conscience,[\[18\]](#) that you don't cause a brother to stumble. A total prohibition against the use of alcohol is conspicuous largely by its absence, particularly to an individual from a conservative Christian sub-culture.

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. Colossians 2:16

Footnotes

[Click on the number to return to the text.]

[1] The Academic American Encyclopedia, online edition, Grolier Electronic Publishing, Danbury, CT, 1993 and Microsoft's Encarta.

[2] A position which advocates total abstinence from alcohol for all but medicinal purposes (like Nyquil).

[3] Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing, and perfect will. Romans 12:2.

[4] They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Matthew 23:4

[5] Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48

[6] Timothy 6:10.

[7] He, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. Revelation 14:10.

[8] I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the Lord and his holy words. Jeremiah 23:9.

[9] At least, not by Paul. What is expected of leaders by the SBC is another matter, entirely.

[10] But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith, and everything that does not come from faith is sin. Romans 14:23.

[11] It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Romans 14:21 KJV.

[12] Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 1 Peter 2:21-22.

[13] The account says that Jesus made 6 jars, which, according to the commentaries, hold from 20 to 30 gallons each.

[14] This re-evaluation is left as an exercise to the reader.

[15] They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Matthew 23:4 Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. Luke 11:46.

[16] In the section [Analysis of Scriptural References to Alcohol](#).

[17] 1 Timothy 6:10.

[\[18\]](#) A conscience that sees prohibitions where God has not made them; a conscience that feels judgement where God has not judged.