

Wine is alcohol

In the last issue, it was pointed out that churches are using liquor to raise money. A regular reader, who is much more of a biblical scholar than I, wrote to defend the Catholic church. He wrote:

I did not agree with your assessment of alcohol and churches. I know there is a strain of anti-alcohol sentiment in some Protestant churches, but the Bible and the Catholic Church have never seen alcohol as something evil in itself. It is the excess use (i.e., drunkenness) that is condemned. Wine, for example, is seen as a good in the Bible, and it was favorably used and referred to by Jesus himself. So a wine-tasting as a fundraiser does not offend me (or seem even slightly off-base).

No, the writer was not Jack Spiker.

Not wanting to believe that any legitimate church finds alcohol consumption positive enough to use it to raise funds for any purpose, I undertook my own research. My conclusion is that the writer is wrong. Some in or close to the Catholic Church may find consumption of wine to be perfectly permissible but there are great contradictions in the Bible to finding it a positive thing.

I believe if you search deep enough, you can find many contradictions in the Bible. Those who choose to quote from Leviticus fail to go far enough. They only want to read about the "abomination" of homosexuality. Read on.

Before I offer a number of words from the Bible I believe show opposition to drinking wine, let me backtrack a bit.

Hazelden Center in Minnesota, one of the most renowned substance abuse treatment centers in the world, says, "Wine, beer and spirits all contain ethyl alcohol, and the amount of alcohol in standard servings of 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of regular beer or a wine cooler, and 1.5 ounces of 80 proof distilled spirits is the same, whether one drinks it straight or in a mixed drink. Ethyl alcohol - the substance that intoxicates ..."

If a wine is to be labeled "table wine," it must not exceed 14% alcohol (by law, with a 1.5% leeway). At the low end, it can be 11% alcohol. By the way, alcoholic strength in wine is the ethanol. Fortified wines are stronger and are becoming more common and they are strengthened with the addition of alcohol, to a range of 17-22%. Sparkling wine range is 8-12%.

And experts conclude that an addiction to alcohol can be formed through consumption of wine - red or white. Hazelden: "Once alcohol is consumed, it is absorbed into an individual's blood system and can be measured as blood alcohol concentration (BAC). The rate of absorption varies according to an individual's height, weight, and the food ingested prior to drinking. Generally, the faster someone drinks, the more inebriated he or she will become, no matter what type of alcohol he or she consumes."

And, "If you drink enough of anything - even 3.2 beer - you can get drunk."

"The supposed benefits of alcohol consumption in reducing heart disease are not good enough reasons for people with alcoholism, or people at increased risk for alcoholism, to drink any amount of alcohol." And, "Any possible health benefits do not offset the risks. Alcohol - whether it is wine, liquor, strong beer, or 3.2 beer - will trigger relapse for the alcoholic."

The Cheyenne Herald does not take a position that social drinking is bad or that every person who drinks alcohol will become dependent on or addicted to alcohol.

The position here is that it is unseemly for governmental groups, churches or schools to use alcohol as a fundraiser. It is hypocritical for any of these groups to preach against the excesses of alcohol consumption when they not only condone its use but promote it - especially as a product to raise funds.

What is said in the Bible about wine?

Proverbs 20:1 - *Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.*

Proverbs 21:17 - *He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not be rich.*

Proverbs 31:4-6 - *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. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, And remember his misery no more.*

Isaiah 24:9 - *They shall not drink wine with a song; Strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.*

Isaiah 24:11 - *There is a cry for wine in the streets. All joy is darkened, The mirth of the land is gone.*

Ezekiel 44:21 - *No priest shall drink wine when he enters the inner court. (Lev. 10:9)*

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

Luke 1:15 - *For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.*

Romans 14:21 - *It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*

Timothy 3:2 - *A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, or good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for*

money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous ...

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

Some will say I have quoted out of context and perhaps that is so, but not deliberately so. I was looking for words in the Bible that suggested that drinking wine was less than met with enthusiasm. With over 200 mentions of wine in the Bible, there are obviously references of favorable disposition toward drinking in moderation. One thing all will agree on, I believe, is that drunkenness is not abided.

The point I would make over and over again is that wine is alcohol. It is not some kind of sweet nectar without the risk of addiction or drunkenness. Because of its comparative alcoholic strength, it is possible to drink longer and larger volumes of wine without busting the BAC level of .08 but wine drinkers will get there.

Wine is the only alcoholic drink referenced by percentage. Beer and "spirits" are by "proof" which must be divided by two to reach the percentage of alcohol it contains.

One Christian website handles the subject of drinking, wine included, as follows:

Alcohol, consumed in small quantities, is neither harmful or addictive. In fact, some doctors advocate drinking small amounts of red wine for its health benefits, especially for the heart. Consumption of small quantities of alcohol is a matter of Christian freedom. Drunkenness and addiction are sin. However, due to the Biblical concerns regarding alcohol and its effects, due to the easy temptation to over-consumption of alcohol, and due to the possibility of causing offense and/or stumbling of others - it is usually best for a Christian to abstain entirely from drinking alcohol.

Doctors also disclose the enhanced risk of health problems associated with drinking more than a single alcoholic drink each day. Two drinks will offset any health benefits one drink might provide.

But, once again, the issue here is not whether drinking moderately or abstaining from drinking alcohol completely is the right thing to do or whether either is advocated in the Bible. It is about the obsession with groups, including government, churches and possibly even schools, to use alcohol to raise money for their purposes.

Yes, the writer has drank alcohol in the past and will drink alcohol of some sort in the future. Probably. But unlikely in public. And, no, the writer is not a recovering alcoholic.

It is the hypocrisy that is stunning in its obviousness that offends me. Alcohol is at the root of far more social ills than tobacco but no group would think of using cigarette sales to raise money.

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