

DID PAUL ADVOCATE SOCIAL DRINKING?

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Soon after moving to Louisiana six years ago, I began noticing a much greater market for alcohol in the state. I had suspected this might be the case due to what I grew up hearing about New Orleans and its famous Mardi Gras and Bourbon Street. Another contributing factor to this truth is the dominant religious influence in that area –Catholicism. Historically, this religion has not only defended recreational consumption of alcohol, it has also controlled a large part of its sales market and has even incorporated it into the worship of God by means of what they call the Eucharist. However, I was quite surprised to find that every department store, grocery, meat market, pharmacy, and gas station, had a liquor aisle. I was amazed to find drive-thru daiquiri shops that would hand alcoholic beverages right to drivers with only a piece of tape over the straw constituting a “closed container.” I was equally amazed that when getting a hair cut my first month there, I was offered a beer while I waited!

Back in Tennessee, I would have never seen such things as these, nor would their pretty bottles be placed in sight of innocent and impressionable children. I was used to the idea that one had to go to a liquor store for “hard liquor” another hint that the stuff was dangerous. Now, I’m sad to see that things are changing in Tennessee.

Where there is such a market for alcohol one may guarantee there will also be many arguments for defending its use, and much religious tolerance. It is safe to say that as Tennessee goes down this road, that will be the case here, too. But regardless of all cultural, political, economical, and historical arguments that may be made, the Bible speaks against the recreational and or social use of intoxicating beverages and we Christians need to gear up our arsenal against this immoral and dangerous practice.

One of my acquaintances told me of a statement he once witnessed a preacher say to an unsuspecting congregation for which he preached. The preacher claimed, “The apostle Paul does not condemn having one drink of wine, or one beer, as long as one drinks responsibly.” This is an incredibly erroneous statement. Indeed, the Bible does not explicitly condemn many things that God is opposed to, but they are implied. Rather than giving an endless list of, “thou shall not’s,” God gives a simple “thou shall” do this or that and then gives positive examples of how to live and negative examples outlining the consequences of wrong living. Paul, likewise, did not need to say, “do not drink one beer or one glass of wine” nor did he need say, “do not smoke a joint or take pills that are not prescribed to you.” These things are implied by the rest of the Bible and should not need to be said. Where are these things implied? There is more scripture concerning drinking than any of lying, adultery, swearing, stealing, Sabbath-breaking, cheating, hypocrisy, pride, or blasphemy. There are 627 references in the Bible to drink and drinking. Let he who truly desires to know God’s position on this matter, carefully examine every one of these verses and do what is consistent with Paul’s cautious exhortation to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).

There is a difficulty, which can and must be patiently overcome; concerning the original words rendered “wine” in our English Bibles. Depending on context this word can mean: intoxicating wine, unfermented fruit juice, or even fruit still on the vine. Consequently, two separate attitudes are found in scripture in regards to wine, depending on, of which type is being spoken. One is “sweet, pleasant, refreshing, and unfermented;” while the other is “exciting, inflaming, and intoxicating.” One is said to “have a blessing in it – and it maketh the heart glad;” while the other “deceit is in it - and it bringeth woe and sorrow.” Obviously, anyone that believes in the infallibility of God’s Word should see that

there are two different wines of which are being spoken. To further confirm that unfermented fruit juice was called wine are many statements by early historians and religious writers living within those times, such as: Plato, Columella, Pliny, Aristotle, Horace, Homer, and Plutarch. Modern Greek and Hebrew scholars agree as well.

Also, wine is said to be “a mocker” (Prov. 20:1). Not wine in excess, but wine, period! Anything in excess can be sinful but is anything a mocker? No! Wine is a mocker, because it deceives men, and lures them into captivity. When wine is in its fermented state we should not even look upon it, is the meaning of Proverbs 23:31-32. Anyone who willingly subjects themselves to this “mocker” and is “deceived thereby” cannot claim, “I am a victim.” They are a fool according to scripture and they stand condemned by God. Recalling the statement made by the erroneous preacher concerning drinking responsibly – the inspired testimony is that any amount of drinking is irresponsible.

Defenders of the practice often cite a statement Paul made to Timothy, “Take a little wine for your stomach’s sake” (1Tim. 5:23). There are two schools of thought on this as to whether the context demands this “wine” to be alcoholic or not. However, neither interpretation has Paul advocating the occasional, so-called, social drink. If Paul here was advocating the use of fermented wine for medicinal purposes then notice these things: (1) It took an apostolic order for Timothy to do such, which shows the taking of it was not the common, accepted practice of a Christian; (2) Even then, two restrictions are given “a little wine, for thy stomach’s sake.”

Many attempts have been made to harmonize the Bible and “social drinking.” The term “social” is not being used as it is defined. People today try and use this term to mean, “one or two drinks,” when the term does not mean that at all. “Social drinking” implies a purpose to promote group activity and has no bearing on the amount of consumption. What is so social about alcohol? If the amount is what is in question, then one is faced with the issue: one man’s amount is not the same as another’s, and each man is at liberty to “do what is right in his own sight.” Furthermore, when was social acceptance ever a concern of God? The Bible tells us not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed (Rom. 12:2). If “social drinking” is acceptable, why not “social fornication.” It is all too obvious that this immoral practice is as one tract has stated, “unjustified, unsocial, unwise, and unscriptural.”