

# What Does the Bible Say About Alcohol?

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Alcohol is the world's most popular sin and the one most loudly defended. People who would never excuse adultery or theft will quickly excuse a drink, and many Christians have learned to call it social drinking rather than face what the Bible says about it. Let us set aside what we have grown comfortable with and look at the Scriptures plainly.

## Wine Is a Mocker

The first thing the Bible says about wine is what it does to people who trust it. *"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise"* ([Proverbs 20:1](#)). Notice the language. It is not heavy drinking that mocks, or strong drink misused. The wine itself is the mocker; the strong drink itself is the raging thing. And the man who thinks he can handle it, the careful moderate drinker, is the one God calls deceived and not wise. The substance promises pleasure and delivers grief, every time it has been given the chance.

## Solomon's Long Warning

The longest single warning against alcohol in the Bible was written by the wisest man who ever lived. Solomon asked a series of plain questions and gave a plain answer: *"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine"* ([Proverbs 23:29-30](#)). Then he gave the command directly: *"Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder"* ([Proverbs 23:31-32](#)). The Christian is not even to look upon it longingly. And the end of that road is exactly what we still see today: *"They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again"* ([Proverbs 23:35](#)). Alcohol always promises one more, and one more is what destroys.

## What About Social Drinking?

Some say a quiet drink with friends is harmless. The New Testament does not agree. Paul wrote, *"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit"* ([Ephesians 5:18](#)). Notice the inspired note about wine itself, *"wherein is excess."* The substance is bound up with excess by its very nature. The Christian is filled with the Spirit through the word of Christ that dwells in him richly ([Colossians 3:16](#)) and has no need of wine to lift his spirits. Peter wrote, *"Be*

sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Sobriety is the steady call, because the devil is hunting, and a man whose head is dulled by drink is easy prey. Peter went further, listing what converts had repented of: "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Peter 4:3). Social drinking, revelling, and banqueting belonged to the Gentile life Christians had left behind, not to the new walk they entered.

## **Romans 14 Does Not License Drinking**

Some try to defend social drinking by appealing to Romans 14, where Paul speaks of disputable matters and the weaker brother. They say drinking is a matter of personal liberty, and the man who calls it sin is the weak brother imposing his scruple. Read carefully, Romans 14 says nothing of the kind. Paul is writing about things that are not in themselves sin. He says, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (Romans 14:14). The chapter deals with meats and days, matters morally indifferent. Drunkenness is not in that category. Paul himself lists it plainly among the works of the flesh: "drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21). What God has condemned outright cannot be turned into a matter of personal liberty by an appeal to Romans 14.

And the very chapter being quoted in defense of drinking commands the drinker, not the abstainer, to give way. Paul wrote, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Romans 14:21). If a man's drinking makes a brother stumble, the same passage he is quoting tells him to put it down. Paul closes the matter with this: "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Anyone whose conscience is uncertain about drinking has just been told, in the very passage he wished to use, not to do it. Romans 14, read honestly, sends the drinker home dry.

## **Did Jesus Make Intoxicating Wine?**

The water-into-wine miracle at Cana is sometimes used to excuse drinking. It does not, when the passage is read carefully. The governor of the feast tasted what Jesus had made and said, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10). The good wine, by his own account, was not the cheaper, stronger drink men served once their guests were past noticing. It was the better kind, the fresh, pure juice of the grape. To say Jesus made intoxicating wine and added it to a feast where men had already "well drunk" is to charge the sinless Son of God with

violating His Father's own word: *"Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!"* ([Habakkuk 2:15](#)). Christ never gave any man cause to stumble, and He never will. The good wine He made was the pure juice of the grape, and He made the best of it.

## **Paul's Prescription to Timothy**

One verse in particular gets pressed into the service of social drinking, and it will not bear the weight. Paul wrote, *"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities"* ([1 Timothy 5:23](#)). Read it the way a careful man would read a doctor's prescription. First, Paul had to command Timothy to take it. Timothy by habit drank only water, and he would not have touched wine on his own, even for his health. Second, the quantity is fixed: a little. Not freely, not with meals, not to relax, a little. Third, the substance: wine, treated here the way we today treat medicine. Fourth, the cause: for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities, a specific ailment. A doctor who writes a prescription for a stomach condition has given a little of something, for a reason. He has not licensed his patient to drink it at parties or with friends. The verse defends medicine. It does not defend social drinking.

## **What Alcohol Did to Bible Men**

The Bible's record on alcohol is consistent and grim. Drunkenness has built nothing and ruined many. Noah, the man whose obedience saved the world, planted a vineyard, drank of the wine, *"and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent"* ([Genesis 9:21](#)), and a curse fell on the line of his grandson Canaan. Lot, dragged out of Sodom by the mercy of God, was made drunk in a cave by his own daughters and fathered the Moabites and Ammonites, two nations that troubled Israel for centuries ([Genesis 19:30-38](#)). Nabal held a feast like the feast of a king, and *"Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken"* ([1 Samuel 25:36](#)); ten days later he was struck dead. King Belshazzar held a drunken feast, mocking God with the vessels of His house, and *"In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain"* ([Daniel 5:30](#)). King Elah of Israel was *"drinking himself drunk"* when his servant Zimri came in and killed him ([1 Kings 16:9-10](#)). Amnon was struck down at the very moment his *"heart is merry with wine"* ([2 Samuel 13:28](#)). The pattern never changes. Alcohol does not bless those who befriend it. It promises company and leaves coffins. The safe path, and the only one worth walking, is to keep far from it.

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*Every Scripture reference in this study links to the King James Version. Open it and read for yourself.*