

3 New Ways to Look at Christians Drinking Wine, Beer and Hard Liquor

Drinking is intertwined in our culture with almost every event in life, whether it's a wedding or a funeral. But it's hardly new.

The Bible records several stories and suggestions about alcohol. Heck, even Jesus turned water into wine, so surely there's a place for alcohol in society, right? (I bet that tasted good.)

For many of us it's a welcomed ritual with benefits. The soothing chill slips by your lips, rolling down into your stomach and releasing its relaxing presence. Drinking alcohol is pleasurable at the moment, lifting spirits and lowering defenses. Sipping champagne is synonymous with celebration, while beer may be synonymous with sports, wine with romance, and vodka martinis—shaken, not stirred—synonymous with James Bond-like cool. It's part of our culture at most every level.

If we believe the advertisers, alcohol is all pleasure but no pain—a fun roller-coaster ride that provides thrills but never comes off the rails, right? Wrong. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates 88,000 deaths are attributed to excessive alcohol use each year, with 1.2 million emergency room and 2.7 million physician office visits.

The economic costs associated with overdrinking were estimated to be \$225.5 billion. Most men know of an alcoholic, were raised by an alcoholic or have been affected by alcohol. We may even be aware of the short- and long-term risks of drinking, like driving dangers, sexual behavior, violence, pregnancy problems, poisoning, neurological changes, psychiatric issues, liver disease and cancer, to name a few.

But you might be surprised that God is not a buzzkill. The Bible never says, "Thou shalt not drink." But God is very concerned about your character, and drinking can be a way God tests it. So, the real question is: When is drinking OK? Here are a few guidelines:

1. Drinking is about context. The top two ways guys connect today is texting and get-togethers. Often men gather over a beer to talk. There's nothing inherently wrong with drinking beer, as long as it doesn't cause someone to question or doubt your authenticity of faith in Christ, and as long as it doesn't cause someone to stumble—literally and figuratively.

Drinking with a few friends isn't the problem, but getting drunk together is. Drinking with a buddy isn't the problem, but it is if he's a recovering alcoholic. Drinking with the boys isn't bad, but drinking and then getting behind the wheel is. Here's the key verse that sums up this point:

"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister" (Rom. 14:13, NIV).

We have the power to self-limit and to allow someone else's faith to blossom, grow or be strengthened. But the opposite is also true.

2. Drinking is about control. Men love to push the limit, getting as close to the cliff as possible. Unfortunately, alcohol can blur the lines, turning a black-and-white issue into hazy gray. It's in those gray moments we can think things, say things and do things under the control of another "spirit." The Bible clearly states to be "sober" minded and not to get drunk so that we never surrender our body, mind or soul to anything other than God. Most of us all have stories about waking up after we've surrendered control, and it's not pretty. So we have to choose to stay away from the cliff, and

be wise.

“Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise” (Prov. 20:1).

“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).

3. Drinking is about character. God’s men are in a continual character development program. Drinking orders up a character test to determine which spirit is shaping yours—God’s Holy Spirit or the world’s liquid spirits. God is more interested in your heart and motives than He is in drinking. If drinking becomes a way to escape problems or boost your courage or help with your honesty, then your faith in God is squeamish and your character is at risk.

But when you’re living God’s purpose, filled with the Holy Spirit, then alcohol isn’t required for a good time and your life will produce good fruit.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

The truth is, alcohol produces synthetic pleasures, honesty and connection. The question is: Can you find joy, truth and integrity without it? Rather than pour out your problems to the next bartender, take a drink of God’s love and Spirit and see what happens. It’s better than a hangover, and it will quench your thirst forever.

Then get yourself around a community of others who share your faith and understanding of self-control and context. This will help you rise to the occasion and have safe connections and a forum to discuss real issues without shots.

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