

Is It Right for a Minister to Drink Wine or Liquor?

The Bible is saturated with wholesome and positive statements about sex, food and wine. But the Bible also contains warnings about all three.

Here's an example of the balance of these three sensory delights.

Food is a necessity. Gluttony is sin.

Sex is a gift from God within marriage. Fornication, adultery and homosexuality are sin.

Wine is a pleasant drink. Drunkenness is sin.

Among these three delights of the senses, food is the only necessity. Although some sex addicts may disagree, sex is only a necessity to populate the earth, but not for the survival of the body. Wine, of course, is neither.

We must understand that the abuse of any of these delights does not do away with the enjoyment that these things can bring to our lives.

Although all three of these delights are permissible and even celebrated in Scripture within God's boundaries, they are also warned about in Scripture, and can become addictions that bring death and destruction.

I'm sure you'll agree with me that the most controversial of these delights among sincere believers is wine. We know sex outside marriage is forbidden. We know food is a necessity, but excessive eating can make us gluttonous. But what about wine?

Most will say, as I've already stated, it is pleasant and

permissible, but you shouldn't abuse it and get drunk. Then there are those professing believers who will go as far to adamantly say that it is Gnostic, pagan and religious to avoid it altogether. Hmmm ... Could this sort of licentious attitude be the beginning of the abuse of Christian liberties—in this case, concerning the drinking of wine?

Notice what the apostle Paul said concerning Christian liberties, specifically the eating of meat offered to idols.

But take heed, lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you, who have knowledge, eating in the idol's temple, shall the conscience of him who is weak not be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols, and by your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? When you thus sin against the brothers, wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to stumble (1 Cor. 8:9-13).

Could the same principle be applied to drinking wine?

The Main Reason I Don't Drink Wine

In Bible school many years ago, one of my most-respected teachers gave an example of the abuse of Christian liberties that I never forgot. He said during lunch hour one day, several pastors were in a restaurant drinking wine with their meal, which by the way, I find no fault in alone, for it is even a part of many cultures today.

It is actually a part of my European/ Portuguese culture and my own upbringing. From an early age, I drank a glass of wine with family meals. Anyway, into the restaurant walks a woman, a young convert and former alcoholic, and observes these pastors drinking wine with their meal. So she thinks it's OK and begins to drink again, and that alcoholic devil got a hold

of her life once more. Think about that. I'd hate to have that on my conscience on Judgment Day.

Here's what the Bible says about that: "But whoever misleads one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung about his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6).

That, my friends, is the reason, in good conscience, I can no longer drink wine. I learned this lesson again years later when I was ministering in Italy with some of my Bible school students. Our gracious Italian hosts offered me a delightful drink that contained some alcohol, which I understood to be a part of their culture. Well, one of my students was greatly offended when I drank it. He understood the culture, but he did not understand his teacher drinking the alcohol-mixed drink. Here's the bottom line:

"It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine, nor do anything whereby your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak" (Rom. 14:21).

Love, and not knowledge, must be the basic principle by which Christians live.

Being a stumbling block involves more than upsetting or offending another. It is a serious and deliberate offense that wounds and weakens another's conscience and can ruin a relationship with Christ. Christian liberty must always be exercised in love with a view to strengthening others.

In the above Scripture, Paul was dealing with eating meat. Eating meat is essentially an ethically neutral act (1 Cor. 8:8), but not all people in Paul's day had that same level of knowledge. Some new converts are uncertain about the power of their former sins and pagan gods. Yet others may know that former gods and idols hold no more power over them.

Knowledge puffs up because it has two basic defects: 1. It has

a tendency to focus on self; 2. And it is inadequate to create a bond in personal relationships. The principle of love is the determining factor in questions of moral insignificance. Love, according to the *Spirit Bible*, places limitations on the liberty of conscience.

In and of themselves, alcoholic beverages, which include wine, are neutral in the Bible, but applied to our lives, can bring trouble and destruction more than they do pleasure.

One glaring definitive verse about the bad effects of wine and alcohol is found in Proverbs: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Prov. 20:1).

It would seem by this verse alone that the closer one gets to the Lord the wiser he will be in his relation to wine and alcohol. Additionally, there are certain biblical restrictions to wine that apply to Nazarites, prophets and priests in the Old Covenant (Ezek. 44:21, Amos 2:11-12, Luke 1:15), and ministers of the New Covenant (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7, 2:3). Furthermore, all believers are called to be vigilant, alert, and sober (1 Thess. 5:5-8)). Wine and strong drink has a tendency to cloud these qualities.

Following are some more verses that speak of the bad effects of wine and strong drink.

1. People in positions of authority such as kings and princes were warned against the use of it.

"It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, Nor for princes intoxicating drink" (Prov. 31:4).

2. Wine and strong drink lead to error and poor judgment.

"But they also have erred through wine and stagger from strong drink; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are confused by wine, they stagger from strong

drink; they err while having visions, they stumble when rendering judgment" (Is. 28:7).

3. Wine is linked to defilement.

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's food, nor with the wine which he drank. Therefore he requested of the master of the officials that he might not defile himself" (Dan. 1:8).

4. Wine enslaves the heart.

"Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart" (Hos. 4:11).

There are 226 verses in the Bible that talk about alcohol. More of them have to do with its bad effects than good. Why then do many Christians defend their right to drink?

Perhaps it is because they are not enjoying a Spirit-filled life. When you're filled with the wine of the Spirit, you will not seek to gratify yourself with the wine of the flesh. If you're not enjoying the Spirit-filled life, you don't yet have what God wants you to have.

There's no doubt God has richly given us earthly delights to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17), but when you maintain a Spirit-filled life, you'll find that Jesus is enough for you. {eoa}