

VI. Alcoholic BeveragesA. Warnings and prohibitions

1. Drunkenness is clearly forbidden in the Bible (Eph 5:18 "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery..."; 1 Cor 5:11 "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is...a drunkard..."; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 Tim 3:2-3; 1 Tim 3:8; see also Gal 5:21; Titus 1:7)
2. People who get drunk lose good judgment and moral restraint (Gen 9:21 Noah; Gen 19:30-36 Lot).
3. In the Old Covenant, all use of wine or "strong drink" was forbidden for certain people (Lev 10:8-9 Aaron and his sons; Num 6:1-4 people who took a Nazirite vow; Luke 1:15 John the Baptist).
4. Warnings against being deceived by alcoholic beverages (Prov 20:1 "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise."; Prov 21:17 "Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich."; Prov 23:20-21; Prov 23:29-35; Prov 31:4-5 "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted).
→ implication for those who have great responsibilities (example of Pres. Bush)
5. Abuse of alcohol is one of the greatest evils in the world today, and leads to many other destructive sins.
Approx. 14,900,000 people in U.S. addicted to alcohol, 3,000,000 more to drugs and alcohol (Sept 5, 2003 statement by Charles G. Curie, admin. of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, in *Washington Times* 9-6-03: www.washtimes.com).
17.9 million / 280 M population = 6% of population!
(Another 3.9 million: addicted to illegal drugs)
"More than 9 percent of the population aged 12 and older has a serious substance-abuse problem" (C. Currie)

- families destroyed	- 5 to 10 years (!!) shorter life expectancy
- violence against others, esp. women and children	- much higher likelihood of liver disease, pneumonia, cancer of esophagus, internal bleeding, suicide
- innocent victims killed by drunk drivers	- serious mental disabilities, many irreversible even w/no alcohol
- jobs lost, careers destroyed	
6. The Bible has other warnings not to make another person "stumble"
This means: your actions leading an immature Christian to act in violation of his or her conscience because of your example of eating meat (or drinking wine)
1 Corinthians 8:4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." 7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? 11 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. 12 Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.
→ application to: children, students, younger Christians who believe that drinking alcoholic beverages is wrong
→ application to: those addicted to alcohol
But "stumble" here does not mean: you make another person upset with you.
(It says "stumble," not "become irritated or annoyed")
Rom. 14:13-21: similar teaching, but Rom. 14:1-12 adds: do not judge one another on questions about food.
14:1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master¹ that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand 13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

B. By contrast, other passages view alcoholic beverages more positively

1. All the warnings against drunkenness in Scripture assume there is a right use of alcohol without such drunkenness
2. Sometimes seen as part of God's good (Ps 104:14-15; Prov 3:9-10; Ecc 9:7; 1 Tim 4:4-5, see also Col 2:20-23: beware wrongful asceticism; 1 Tim 5:23: increasing recent evidence of health benefits of moderate use of wine)

3. Sometimes, part of joyful celebration in the presence of God (Gen 14:18 “Melchizedek...brought out bread and wine”; Deut 14:24-26; John 2:6-11; Matt 26:27-29)
4. Yet a caution: not everything that is right is wise or helpful to others (1 Cor 10:23-31 “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful...So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”)

C. Questions for application (there is room for personal differences on these! Rom 14:3)

1. Should Christians practice “total abstinence”?
effect on self? witness, example to others?
2. Should churches require total abstinence?
for membership? for church office?
3. What is the best witness to society?

D. How do you define being drunk?

→ where you are not thinking clearly, where you have lost some moral restraint, where your actions bring reproach on your reputation or on the Gospel, or where you have lost good physical coordination (as in driving)

According to Richard Baxter (British Puritan pastor, 1673):

Ch.8, p. 318 “Drunkenness strictly taken, signifieth drinking till reason have received some hurt: and of this there be many degrees. He that hath in the least degree disturbed his reason, and disabled or hindered it from its proper office, is drunken in that degree: and he that hath overturned it, or quite disabled it, is stark drunk, or drunk in a greater degree.”

Ch. 8, p. 320 “And of those that are truly drunken also, there are many degrees and kinds. As some will be drunk with less and some with more; so some are only possessed with a little diseased levity, and talkativeness, more than they had before: some also have distempered eyes, and stammering tongues: some also proceed to unsteady, reeling heads, and stumbling feet, and unfitness for their callings: some go further, to sick and vomiting stomachs, or else to sleepy heads: and some proceed to stark madness, quarrelling, railing, bawling, hooting, ranting, roaring, or talking nonsense, or doing mischief: the furious sort being like mad dogs that must be tied; and the sottish, prating, and spewing sort being commonly the derision of the boys in the streets.”

(... Baxter quotes from Robby & Suzy Kuhlman)

E. Objections (arguments for total abstinence from alcohol)

Objection 1: “Alcoholic beverages in Biblical times were watered down, not as potent”

Answer: → perhaps so, but (1) not in all cases, and (2) people got drunk on them just the same, or there would be no warnings against drunkenness (Eph. 5:18)

Objection 2: “Abstinence is the only sure guarantee of not becoming an alcoholic.”

“The only certain way to avoid alcohol- ... influenced thinking, speaking, and behavior and to avoid addiction is not to take the first drink I conclude that the production, sale, and use of beverage alcohol ... are incompatible with biblical principles” (Robertson McQuilkin, *Biblical Ethics* (revised edition; Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1995), p. 98.

Answers:

- (a) Individuals may decide that abstinence is the best approach for themselves, for various reasons (family history, personal history, not wanting to offend or mislead others, deep concern about evils of alcoholism in society). Others should respect that decision and not pressure them to change.
- (b) But the Bible does not tell us to be more strict than what it requires just so we are “safe” (This would be like Rabbinic teaching in 1st century: “putting a fence around the law”)

How to guarantee you will:

- never commit adultery?
Never talk to a woman (John 4:27).
- never kill another person in an auto accident?
Never drive.
- never shoot someone accidentally?
Never go hunting or even touch a gun.
- never look at pornography on the internet?
Never buy a computer.
- never declare bankruptcy?
Never start a business.
- never believe in a false religion?
Never visit any other church.

→ These are all excessively strict rules that we would not enforce on ourselves or others.

(c) It is not the only certain way to avoid becoming drunk. Another certain way is not to become drunk.

Objection 3: “There is no harm done when churches require total abstinence, and it may do much good in stopping people from becoming alcoholics and harming themselves and others.”

Answers:

- (a) There is harm done when we keep people away from the church by standards that are more strict than Scripture (proclaiming, in effect, that to be a Christian you have to give up all use of alcohol) (Titus 1:10-11)
- (b) There is harm done when we make standards more strict than Scripture: (1 Tim 4:3-5; Col 2:20-23)
→ Isn't the Christian life hard enough without adding man-made rules to what God has already given us?
- (c) The broader issue is not alcohol but whether we believe the moral standards of Scripture are God's best for us. (This is the doctrine of the “sufficiency of Scripture” or the “Scripture alone” (*sola Scriptura*) principle (Ps 119:1 “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!”; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

There is a temptation to depart from this in every generation (in various ways).

(There are two errors to avoid: either disobeying Scripture (taking from it) or adding to it)

F. But don't forget the great dangers and great harm that comes from drunkenness

Alcohol is a factor in:

- 57% of marital violence
 - 41% of child molestation
 - 59% of all murders
 - 54% of all rapes
 - 46% of all thefts
 - over 40% of all teenage suicides
 - 47 % of industrial injuries
- (from R. McQuilkin, *Biblical Ethics*, p. 97)

Additional notes from Don Farr:

- 80% of suicides
- 66% of traffic fatalities – alcohol related

14.9 million addicted to alcohol in U.S.

3.2 million addicted to both alcohol and drugs

3.9 million addicted to drugs

Cost of alcoholism to U.S. population: About \$600/person/ year in U.S. (over \$166,000,000,000: see separate page)

Updated cost estimates for 1992 and inflation- and population-adjusted costs of alcohol and drug abuse for 1995 [in millions of current-year dollars].

Category	Alcohol		Drugs	
	1992	1995	1992	1995
Specialty alcohol & drug services	5,573	6,660	4,400	5,258
Medical consequences	13,247	15,830	5,531	6,623
Lost earnings--premature death	31,327	34,921	14,575	16,247
Lost earnings—illness	69,209	77,150	15,682	17,481
Lost earnings--crime/victims	6,461	7,231	39,164	43,829
Crashes, fires, criminal justice, etc.	22,204	24,752	18,307	20,407
Total	148,021	166,543	97,659	109,832

Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1992. Analysis by the Lewin Group, Harwood, H.; Fountain, D.; and Livermore, G. Bethesda, MD: DHHS, NIH, NIH Publication No. 98-4327 (September 1998)

Note: Components may not sum to totals because of rounding.

VI. The use of hallucinogenic (“mind-altering”) drugs:

- A. Drugs that “give a false or distorted impression of objects or events” often with a compelling sense of their reality. (*American Heritage Dictionary*, “hallucinate”)
 - 24% of teenagers in U.S. now use them (!!)
- B. These are always “intoxicating” or cause a different kind of “drunkenness” – so Bible passages on drunkenness (above) would also forbid use of these drugs.
 - Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit (also: 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-11; Gal. 5:21; 1 Tim. 3:2, 8; Titus 1:7)
- C. Other Scripture passages:
 - 1 Peter 4:7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

Galatians 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,
"sorcery": Liddell-Scott Lexicon: φαρμακεία, ἡ, (φαρμακεύω) I. 1. the use of drugs, potions, spells, Plat. 2.
poisoning, witchcraft, Lat. veneficium, Dem. II. remedy, cure, Arist.
Revelation 9:21 nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.
Revelation 21:8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral,
sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the
second death." (also Rev. 18:23; 22:15)

- D. Harmful, destructive results provide another argument that such drug use is wrong
1. Often highly addictive
 2. Use of drugs leads to much crime and other evil, because a person's moral sense and rational judgment are impaired (see estimate from NIH: cost: \$400/ person/year in US)
medical marijuana? → danger of impaired judgment, for ex. while driving
 3. Some drugs can cause permanent mental and physical damage
 4. The "hallucinations" and "visions" that people see when on drugs (or when drunk) are probably not all just a product of their imagination, but may in fact be manifestations of demonic spirits
 - (1) Matt. 7:15-16: "You will recognize them by their fruits."
 - (2) Verses on "sorcery" (above) refer to a recognized connection between hallucinogenic drug use and the "magic" used in pagan religions.

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<http://www.christianessentialssbc.com>