



ALCOHOL, COFFEE, AND TEA: SCRIPTURALLY FORBIDDEN INTOXICANT AND STIMULANT BEVERAGES OR SCRIPTURALLY PERMITTED HEALTH DRINKS?

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This article will discuss the blessings and dangers of alcohol, coffee, and tea consumption and answer the question as to whether or not Scripture allows believers to consume these beverages.

WHAT ARE ALCOHOL, COFFEE, AND TEA?

alcohol:

A liquid produced through the distilling or fermentation of grains or fruit juice that is the intoxicating constituent of wine, beer, spirits, and other drinks [1].

coffee:

A drink made from the roasted and ground beanlike seeds of a tropical shrub, served hot or iced [2].

tea:

A drink made by infusing the dried, crushed leaves of the tea plant in boiling water [3].

Alcohol and coffee are both derived from clean edible plant products: fruits, grains, and seeds.

GENESIS 1:29:

And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.”

ALCOHOL

It is written in God’s law that man is permitted to drink alcohol, but with the restriction to not drink to excess in drunkenness.

DEUTERONOMY 14:26:

And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, *for wine or strong drink*, for whatever your heart desires; and you shall eat there before YHWH (the Lord) your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.

EPHESIANS 5:18:

And be not drunk with wine, in which there is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

1 TIMOTHY 5:23:

No longer drink only water, *but use a little wine* for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

Alcohol has been both a blessing and a curse to humanity throughout the generations. Moderate alcohol drinkers reap many benefits including a cheerful disposition and improved health. There are numerous medical studies that show moderate alcohol drinkers and even heavy drinkers outlive people who abstain from alcohol altogether [4].

ALCOHOL MAKES THE HEART GLAD AND MERRY

There are many positive aspects of consuming alcohol. Various Scripture references refer to alcoholic wine as a drink that makes one merry, glad, and is something to drink when rejoicing (Deuteronomy 14:26; Judges 9:13; Ruth 3:7; Esther 1:10; Psalm 104:15; Ecclesiastes 9:7, 10:19).

WINE AND ALCOHOLIC DRINKS: A BLESSING FROM GOD

God provided wine and alcohol as a blessing for His people (Genesis 27:28; Deuteronomy 7:13, 11:14, 14:26, 33:28; 2 Kings 18:32; Isaiah 62:8-9, 65:8; Joel 2:19,24, 3:18; Amos 9:13-14). God likewise withheld wine from His people when He cursed their lands (Deuteronomy 28:39; Hosea 2:8-9; Joel 1:10-12; Micah 6:15; Haggai 1:11).

YESHUA (JESUS) DRANK ALCOHOLIC WINE

LUKE 7:33-34:

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

Yeshua (Jesus) stated that He ate bread and drank alcoholic wine while simultaneously pointing out the hypocrisy of His adversaries who made accusations against both Him (who drank alcohol) and John the Baptist (who did not drink alcohol) (Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6).

The accusatory Pharisees and lawyers rejected God through Yeshua (Jesus), accusing Him of *drinking*, and they also rejected John the Baptist who *did not drink* (Luke 7:30).

Yeshua (Jesus) served wine at His last supper (Matthew 26:26-29) and He created wine at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-11). Yeshua (Jesus) never got drunk.

BAPTIST TEMPERANCE DOCTRINE

During the Colonial America period, Puritans expected Christians to drink alcohol. Many Southern ministers operated stills and sold alcohol during the 1800's. Parishioners who owned stills would often tithe their alcohol and preachers would receive whiskey as part of their salary for their services [5].

The doctrine of temperance is the belief that to serve or consume alcohol is a sin, thus requiring the believer to totally abstain from consuming alcoholic drinks altogether. As Christian theology, the doctrine prescribing a total prohibition of alcohol consumption is a relatively new American phenomenon. The American Temperance movement began to change the culture of Christianity's view of alcohol in the South. John Wesley introduced the teaching that consuming any and all alcohol is sinful in the late 1700's.

The temperance movement organized church leaders into having their congregations completely abstain from alcohol. Southern Baptists did not adopt the idea of alcohol as sin until the early 1800's. In 1896, the Southern Baptist Convention officially denounced alcohol and asked that churches excommunicate anyone who drank or sold alcohol. Up until that time, alcohol was a normal part of Southern Baptist Christian life. For the first time in Southern Baptist history, drinking alcohol was considered immoral. Baptists had decided, for societal reasons, that alcohol itself was wrong and sinful. Afterward they turned to the Scriptures to find support for their Temperance Doctrine [6].

As Southern Baptists began to abstain from alcohol, they attempted to support their abstinence view by twisting Scripture and intentionally misreading verses. Specifically, the Baptists proclaimed that whenever Scripture spoke of the blessing of wine, it was speaking of unfermented grape juice. Thus, Southern Baptists created a new product out of thin air, 'unfermented wine,' of which there is no such product.

FERMENTED WINE OR GRAPE JUICE?

Southern Baptist teachings attempt to make the case that all wine spoken of in Scripture that Yeshua (Jesus) and the prophets drank was unfermented, non-alcoholic grape juice and that any use of fermented alcoholic wine is always condemned in Scripture. This argument does not hold up to any reasonable Scripture scrutiny.

NOAH AND LOT GOT DRUNK - Noah drank wine, got drunk, and passed out naked in his tent (Genesis 9:21). Lot became drunk on consecutive nights when his daughters served him wine to excess. Lot's daughters, after weakening their father's perception with wine, proceeded to conceive children with their father through acts of incestuous sex while Lot was drunk (Genesis 19:30-38). Noah and Lot were righteous men of Scripture in whom YHWH (the Lord) found grace (Genesis 6:8-9, 19:19). Both Noah and Lot drank wine, to the point of intoxication, indicating that it was *alcoholic* wine that they consumed. If drinking alcoholic wine was a sin, Noah and Lot would never have drunk alcoholic wine at all. It is not a sin to drink alcohol, but getting drunk can be problematic - even for the righteous.

There may have been a scientific reason that Noah and Lot got drunk. They both got drunk *after* the great flood. It has been scientifically verified that the oxygen content of the pre-flood Earth was around 35% and was reduced to 20% after the flood. Noah and Lot may not have been adjusted to Earth's new oxygen-depleted atmosphere, which could have caused them to not be able to handle the alcohol amount that they had previously consumed before the flood, and they were therefore not able to remain sober and got drunk.

ALCOHOLIC WINE REQUIRES NEW WINESKINS - Yeshua (Jesus) said, **“Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins and both are preserved” (Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38)**. It is clear that (Yeshua) Jesus is speaking of alcoholic *fermenting* wine. During fermentation, to make wine alcoholic, new wine expands. If new wine were filled into old wineskins, wineskins that have already been stretched out from a previous wine fermentation procedure, the new fermentation process would stretch out the old wineskins even further and burst them. Therefore it is necessary to put new fermenting wine into new wine skins. If Yeshua (Jesus) were referring to grape juice, the fact is that it would be possible to put non-fermenting grape juice into old wineskins, since grape juice does not expand. New grape juice poured into old wineskins will not cause the old wineskins to burst. Therefore, it can only be fermenting alcoholic wine that Yeshua (Jesus) refers to when speaking of 'new wine.'

INDEED MY BELLY IS LIKE WINE THAT HAS NO VENT; IT IS READY TO BURST LIKE NEW WINESKINS (Job 32:19). Job is comparing his belly to new wineskins containing fermenting wine. New wineskins become 'ready to burst' after they have been expanded by wine that is fermenting inside of them.

ALCOHOL USE IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH - The Apostle Paul admonished the Corinthians in a letter to them, explaining that it was not proper for the church to congregate for the purpose of eating the Lord's Supper or to *drink and get drunk* inside the church of God. Paul further explains that the congregation should not eat *or drink* in the church of God, *but should do so in their own houses* (1 Corinthians 11:22). This clearly indicates that the early church used alcoholic wine.

THE END: RIDDING SOCIETY OF ALCOHOL ABUSE, DOES NOT JUSTIFY THE MEANS: AN ALCOHOL ABSTINENCE FALSE DOCTRINE

The Baptist Temperance Doctrine is a false doctrine that was perhaps started with good intentions - to eradicate alcohol abuse, but also involves issues of church control, criminalizing drinkers, and the spreading of falsehoods. The Temperance Doctrine is an evil doctrine of men, because it falsely accuses anyone who chooses to drink alcohol in moderation as being a sinner for doing so. Believers have the choice as to whether to drink responsibly or to not drink. Alcohol, when consumed in moderation, is a blessing and when consumed in excess becomes a curse. The same can be said of food, yet no Christian denomination is calling for Christians to abstain from food! Scripture does not demand alcohol abstinence, but permits alcohol consumption while giving many warnings about not drinking to excess.

VOLUNTARILY ABSTAINING FROM ALCOHOL

THE NAZIRITE VOW (NUMBERS 6:1-21). The vow of the Nazirite was a *voluntary* vow that an Israelite man or woman made to separate his or herself to YHWH (the Lord) (Numbers 6:2). It required abstaining from alcoholic drinks, as well as all grape products (Numbers 6:3-4). It was also required to let the locks of hair grow and that no razor would touch his or her head. When taking the Nazirite vow, the Nazirite was permitted to drink wine after an offering was made to YHWH (the Lord) and before beginning to abstain from alcohol (Numbers 6:20). God also decreed certain Scripture figures to be Nazirites even before they were born. Scripture's most notable figures who lived by the Nazirite vow and abstained from alcohol throughout their lives were Samson (Judges 13, 16:17) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:11-15).

NUMBERS 6:1-3:

Then YHWH (the Lord) spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to YHWH (the Lord), he shall separate himself from wine and similar strong drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins.'"

When an Israeli man or woman made the vow of the Nazirite, he or she separated themselves to YHWH (the Lord) and it was required that they not consume wine AND / OR grape juice. Wine and grape juice are TWO DIFFERENT DISTINCT DRINKS as Scripture verifies in Numbers 6:1-3. Wine is fermented alcoholic grape juice. Grape juice is fresh squeezed juice from grapes. There is NO SUCH THING AS UNFERMENTED WINE! That's why Scripture calls wine, 'wine' and grape juice, 'grape juice.'

Yeshua (Jesus) was born in Bethlehem and afterward moved to Nazareth, but the Scriptures do not record Him taking the vow of the Nazirite. Yeshua (Jesus) drank alcoholic wine on numerous occasions. It would be unnecessary and illogical for Yeshua (Jesus) to take the vow of the Nazirite. Yeshua Messiah (Jesus Christ) *is* the Lord, so He could not take a vow that would separate Himself unto Himself.

If God's law forbade alcohol, the Nazirite vow would be meaningless and pointless. If consuming alcohol were a sin, it would be pointless to make a vow not to drink alcohol, since one would be required already by the law of God to abstain from alcohol. Making a vow to do what is already in the law is meaningless and proves that Southern Baptist and Seventh Day Adventist alcohol prohibition teachings are wrong.

DANGERS OF ALCOHOL ABUSE

Excessive alcohol consumption has caused the ruin of many lives. Alcohol abusers negatively affect those around them and society in general. Excessive alcohol use is detrimental to health and shortens the lifespan and quality of life of the abuser.

Today there are dangers associated with consuming alcohol that did not exist for persons in the times that the Scriptures were written. Alcohol intoxicated persons pose a potential serious threat not only to themselves, but also to people all around them. Dangers involved with the consumption of alcohol in the post-Industrial Age involve the use of machinery, particularly, but not limited to the operation of motor vehicles. Approximately 37% of all automobile fatalities in the United States were alcohol-related in 2008 [7].

Alcohol abuse has many negative effects on societies. Alcohol is a contributor in birth defects, homicides, and a significant factor in most other types of crime. Heavy alcohol drinking, primarily vodka, causes an extraordinary number of deaths in Russia, where male life expectancy is about 60 years [8].

The Alcohol Beverage Labeling Act (ABLA) is a United States federal law enacted in 1988. The act requires that labels of alcoholic beverages carry a government warning that reads:

GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS. (2) CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IMPAIRS YOUR ABILITY TO DRIVE A CAR OR OPERATE MACHINERY, AND MAY CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS.

Scripture warns alcohol drinkers to not linger long with wine and to stop drinking when wine begins *to move*, i.e. when a drinker begins to become intoxicated (Proverbs 23:29-35).

Alcohol drinkers who come to realize that they are alcoholics or problem drinkers, who cannot limit or control their drinking once they get started, make a wise decision in choosing to abstain from alcohol altogether.

SCRIPTURE WARNINGS AGAINST DRUNKENNESS

There are many verses in Scripture that speak of the dire consequences of excessive alcohol consumption and drunkenness. Scripture warns that consuming excess wine and strong drink causes a man to stumble (Job 12:25; Psalm 107:27; Isaiah 19:14). Wine and strong drink make a person unwise (Proverbs 20:1, 23:29-35, 26:9, 31:4-7; Isaiah 5:11,22, 28:1,7). Wine *and* harlotry can enslave a man's heart (Hosea 4:11). A lover of wine will become poor financially, physically, and spiritually (Proverbs 21:17). Believers should not have close associations with drunkards (Proverbs 23:20; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13). Drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10, Galatians 5:21). Ultimately, drunkards pay a terrible price for alcohol abuse.

COFFEE AND TEA

Coffee and tea are derived from plants. Coffee and tea contain a mild stimulant, caffeine, which helps keep coffee and tea drinkers alert and awake. It is the very thing that makes coffee and tea desired drinks, their caffeine content, which has given them a bad rap among some people.

Numerous studies have shown that moderate coffee and tea consumption reaps numerous health benefits, but drinking decaffeinated coffee is actually not healthy.

Seventh Day Adventist Ellen G. White and Mormon Joseph Smith both condemned the drinking of coffee and tea. There is no Scripture basis for condemning naturally caffeinated beverages such as coffee or tea, derived from seeds and leaves.

ALCOHOL AND COFFEE TOGETHER

As it turns out, new studies have shown that while drinking alcohol and coffee in moderation individually is beneficial to health, consuming them together is even more beneficial. Alcohol drinkers who drink coffee regularly reduce the incidence of Alzheimer's and liver disease that can be caused by heavy drinking [8][9].

God has blessed man with alcohol, coffee, and tea. These beverages can be abused, as can most blessings that God has bestowed upon man. Moderation, responsibility, and self-control with consuming alcohol, coffee, and tea is the key to reaping their benefits.

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