

3 Things To Think About Before You Drink

Intro: For some time now various groups and organizations have used “Think Before You Drink” in campaigns to prevent drunk driving. I’m not belittling their efforts (except those made by companies producing alcoholic beverages). I understand that most of our society is not going to adopt an abstinence policy when it comes to beer and alcohol, so urging them to plan ahead is a noble idea, even if it is one doomed to failure.

Recently one of our college-age students asked me to re-preach a sermon I did a few years back on drinking. Well, I’m not going to preach that exact lesson, even though some of the points will be the same. Rather, in this lesson I also want us to “Think Before You Drink”. But our focus won’t be on having a designated driver, or having an uber on standby. No, I want to challenge you to think much deeper than that. I want to give you *3 Things To Think About Before You Drink*.

- I. Think about how you *could be* supporting a great evil.
 - a. Your first thought may be “why is drinking evil if the Bible speaks favorably of it?”
 - i. There are certainly passages that speak of drinking wine in more than favorable terms. Consider Ecclesiastes 9.7; 10.19; Psalm 104.15.
 - ii. However, the Scriptures also give stern warnings against drinking wine (Proverbs 20.1; 31.4; Isaiah 5.22).
 - 1) Note: while “strong drink” (Hebrew *shekar*) is always condemned, the same term is translated as “wine” (Hebrew *yayin*) in all of these passages. It can be both good and bad.
 - iii. It is true that the Greek and Hebrew words for wine (*yayin* and *oinos*) can mean both fermented and unfermented grape juice, I concede that God’s people in both the OT and NT partook of fermented wine.
 - 1) While there are brethren who disagree and maintain that God’s people only drank unfermented grape juice and that they had adequate means of preserving the unfermented juice, I’m not convinced. Fermentation is a natural process and based on historical evidence, fermented wine was a staple of the ancient world.
 - 2) ““You’ve got to remember [that] for thousands of years, if you lived in a town or a village, the water was pretty undrinkable. ... [I]f you lived in ancient Athens or if you lived in ancient Babylon or Alexandria, you couldn’t drink the water, so wine was something that people drank from morning to night. Babies drank it; old people drank it; soldiers drank it; everybody drank wine all the time, and in order for them not to be falling down drunk by 10 in the morning, they mixed it with water and used it to sanitize or purify the water.”¹
 - iv. Paul Earnhart gives this explanation for why the Bible speaks of wine as both good and bad: “The Bible treats wine in two ways, as a drug or social drink (bad), as a food or table drink (good). Some have suggested that the only difference between the two is in the amount one drinks and not in the nature of the beverage. The extra-biblical evidence does not point that way”²

¹ Paul Lukacs, author of “Inventing Wine: A Modern History of One of the World’s Most Ancient Pleasures” in a NPR interview. Quoted by Doy Moyer in Pressing On, April 2016.

² Earnhart, Paul. Christianity Magazine. May 1990.

- 1) He then goes on to give examples of just how diluted normal table wine would have been:³
 - a) Homer mentions a ratio of 20 to 1 (*Odyssey*).
 - b) In the first century, Pliny refers to the mixture in the same district as 8 to 1 (*Natural History*).
 - c) The fullest source of information is Athenaeus (A.D. 200) who in his *The Learned Banquet* quotes earlier writers who spoke of mixtures of 3 to 1, 4 to 1, 2 to 1, 5 to 2, and called 3 to 2 “strong”.
 - d) Mnesthus of Athens observed: “Mix it half and half, and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse.”
 - e) Plutarch, early in the second century A.D., said, “We call a mixture ‘wine’, although the larger of the components is water.”
- 2) Finally, note his conclusion regarding the difference between ancient wines and modern alcoholic beverages: “The ancient world knew nothing of distillation, of the modern alcoholic drinks that are 40–50% alcohol. Their wines were a maximum of 14% alcohol and Palestinian wines no more than 8%. Unless diluted with three or more parts of water, even pagans considered them strong drink to be avoided. The purpose of that dilution was to make the wine a harmless non-intoxicating table food. By these standards every modern alcoholic beverage from beer to whiskey is strong drink... Surely the Bible’s demand for sobriety must be more stringent than that of ancient paganism.”⁴
 - v. The point: we can’t simply say that because they drank wine in Bible times we now have a license to drink. It’s not an apples to apples comparison!
- b. Now consider the evils associated with alcohol:
 - i. 28 people die every day in America as a result of drunk driving crashes.⁵
 - 1) During the 2016 Super Bowl there was a commercial for Budweiser starring the actress Helen Mirren, a commercial where she never encouraged the viewer to buy Budweiser, rather she belittled anyone who would drive while drunk. The commercial was widely praised for its message and sensibilities. I found it to be revolting! 28. Die. Every. Day. They die because of Budweiser’s product!
 - ii. “About 3 million violent crimes occur each year in which victims perceive the offender to have been drinking at the time of the offense. Among those victims who provided information about the offender’s use of alcohol, about 35% of the victimizations involved an offender who had been drinking.”⁶
 - iii. “Two-thirds of victims who suffered violence by an intimate (a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend) reported that alcohol had been a factor. Among spouse victims, 3 out of 4 incidents were reported to have involved an offender who had been drinking.”⁷
 - iv. Alcohol consumption increases the probability of divorce by 20%⁸

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <http://www.madd.org/drunk-driving/about/drunk-driving-statistics.html>

⁶ <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ac.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10487734>

- v. Alcohol consumption is directly linked to poor job performance and employability.⁹
- c. The place of alcohol in our society is far from the blessing described in Psalm 104.15. No, alcohol in our society sounds much more like the warning given in Ephesians 5.18, “do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation.” Its rotten fruits include death, suicide, violent crime, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, poor workplace and school performance, etc.
- d. Maybe you’re one of the fortunate ones who drinks only moderately and you’ve never been adversely affected by alcohol. Consider yourself fortunate because untold millions have been negatively affected by this cancer on our society.
- e. Think about how you *would be* supporting a great evil.
 - i. Your participation in drinking contributes to an industry that wrecks lives.
 - ii. Please, seriously consider the warning of Scripture: “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them” (Eph. 5.11).
- II. Think about how you *could be* giving off some unintended signals.
 - a. You *may be* signaling that God’s warnings and exhortations shouldn’t be taken too seriously.
 - i. First, God doesn’t just warn about drunkenness!
 - 1) We’ve already noted some Old Testament passages that warn against wine (Proverbs 20.1; 23.31-32; 31.4).
 - 2) Then consider God’s warning in 1Peter 4.3:
 - a) Carousing: "a joyous meal or banquet, in the NT" (BDAG) See also Gal. 5.21.
 - b) Drinking Party: "*a social gathering at which wine was served, drinking party*" (BDAG)
 - ii. He also exhorts us to be “sober and alert” (1Peter 5.8; 1Thess. 5.6,8).
 - 1) Consider that the CDC warns that those “participating in other activities requiring skill, coordination, and alertness” should not consume alcohol.¹⁰
 - 2) Then ask yourself this question: if my teenage son or daughter were out with friends, would I want them to drink? No... because you want them to be sober and alert!
 - 3) God wants the same from his children.
 - iii. Finally, He exhorts us to exercise “self-control” (1Corinthians 9.25).
 - 1) Alcohol takes away self-control! You don't need to drink much alcohol before your ability to drive becomes impaired. Impairment in judgment begins at a blood alcohol level of as little as .02%. That’s basically one beer for a 160-pound man with an empty stomach.
 - 2) How much alcohol does it take to cause a Christian’s praying skills or parenting skills to be impaired?
 - 3) At what point do you begin to make unwise and unrighteous choices?
 - b. You *may be* signaling that enslavement isn’t really a concern.

⁹ <https://www.ncadd.org/about-addiction/addiction-update/drugs-and-alcohol-in-the-workplace>

¹⁰ As quoted by Doy Moyer in Pressing On, April 2016.

- i. You know that addiction is a struggle for many and you no doubt claim you would quit drinking if it becomes a problem. But since it's not a problem for you yet, you continue to drink.
- ii. Such an attitude is a far cry from Paul's statement that "all things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything" (1Cor. 6:12) and "just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification" (Romans 6:19).
- iii. Facts are that enslavement may only be a few drinks away. Jesus commanded us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13). Is it possible for a person to sincerely pray that prayer and be a social drinker, realizing that drinking is what *led* every drunk who ever got drunk to commit the sin of drunkenness?
- iv. If we are enslaved to anything, let it be to righteousness (Romans 6:19)!
- c. You *may be* signaling that your highest aim isn't the Father's glory.
 - i. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1Cor. 6:19-20).
 - ii. Can you glorify God by participating in an activity that has destroyed the lives of so many? I cannot see a way to answer that question in the affirmative. So, if you choose to drink it will be for your own reasons and not the Father's glory.
- d. Think about how you *would be* giving off some unintended signals
- III. Think about how you *could be* showing little concern for the souls of others.
 - a. Maybe you are indeed one of those lucky ones that can drink only in moderation. Maybe it will never affect your health or ruin a single relationship. If only everyone else was so fortunate.
 - b. We are beseeched to not "do anything by which your brother stumbles" (Romans 14:21). And alcohol makes many of our brethren stumble!
 - i. Wilson Adams relates these words from a brother who struggles with alcohol but has been sober for 10 years: "*I go to an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meeting where people like me confess their struggles and where it is acknowledged openly that we cannot place ourselves in any situation where we would be tempted to drink—and then I attend a Sunday Bible class and hear a brother in Christ make a comment that he 'doesn't see anything wrong with social drinking...' and I'm left shaking my head.*"¹¹
 - ii. Steve Klein shares this heart-rending story: "On March 8, 2015, I received a phone call from a young man in jail in Texas. He called me after having been shot during a domestic altercation with his girlfriend which occurred after both had been drinking. He'd been treated for his wound, arrested and incarcerated. He later told me that he wanted to stop drinking because he realized that it removes his inhibitions and self-control. I knew this young man well. He had been taught that drinking was wrong from his youth; his parents did not drink, and he was never around social drinkers growing up. But, not long after leaving home as a young adult, he began buying beer

¹¹ Pressing On, April 2016.

and drinking at home. Some Christian had told him that the Bible doesn't condemn social drinking. So, after a while, he began to drink with buddies socially after work. Later, his drinking played a part in leading him to become involved in sins that ultimately caused him to lose his family to divorce. This young man is in a sad spiritual condition. I have prayed many prayers and cried many tears for him. He is my son."¹²

- c. Maybe if my brethren took the 1 AM phone calls from the spouse whose husband has been drinking, they would think differently. Or, if they counseled the teen who's been expelled from school for having vodka in his locker, they would see just how vile this stuff is.
- d. Think about how you *would be* showing little concern for the souls of others.

Conclusion: These are hard things to think about. Social drinking is an accepted part of our society, and many do not suffer any ill from the practice. But many others do. Jesus died to free us from ills of this world which so easily entangle us. And it's for that reason I hope you will think on these things before you drink.

¹² Ibid.