

Understanding the Bible

Drinking and drunkenness

There is a lot of pressure on people to be part of the group. Often with this goes alcohol consumption. In Bible times wine was the favoured drink. But there was a reason people used to drink wine in those times; the water supplies were first unreliable and second they were often poor quality or polluted. To prevent sickness from poor water or to overcome shortages of water, wine was made locally and drunk as an adjunct to or substitute for water. However even in Bible times, drunkenness was a problem.

Proverbs 20:1

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

Proverbs 21:17

He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

Isaiah 5:11

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine in flame them!

This was the way it was in Old Testament times. Wine was obviously a problem even then, but the overuse of it is clearly condemned. Why? because overuse changes people from being rational people into those who are irrational and lose any perspective of reality.

The New Testament reasoning is much the same; the followers of Jesus Christ must be in control of themselves at all times. Excessive use of wine or other narcotics which dull the senses are not required and are spoken against. The Apostle Paul did not however forbid wine; in fact he said that Timothy should have a little for medicinal purposes! But he also spoke strongly against its overuse.

1 Tim. 5:23

Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

Ephes. 5:18

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

Romans 13:13

Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

1 Peter 4:3

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

Notice in the passage to Timothy, that he also says “drink no longer water...” The water of many places was very poor quality and caused disease in the communities. Roman water reticulation used lead pipes, which contaminated the water. The wine was kept separate and hence caused no such problems. This was why it was used for medicinal purposes.

Drinking alcohol purely as a social thing is not acceptable in the scripture. It weakens self control, causes damage to the body and can cause one to injure and endanger others. To lose self control is a thing not to be accepted among those in Christ Jesus. It dulls the senses and removes the consumer from the reality of the moment. This is exactly what Christ does not want. He wants his followers to be “watching” for his return, which could occur at any time.

He repeats a certain word: “watch”, many times in the four Gospel records. For example Matthew 25:13

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

This word occurs a number of times in Jesus' teachings and should be noted. Example: Matthew 24:48-50

But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: