

**ALCOHOL**  
Proverbs 31:4-7  
By Raymond White

A standard belief of several Christian denominations (Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Mormons, Adventists, others) is abstinence from alcohol. Since it is clear that Jesus drank wine (not grape juice), indeed he even made wine, is total abstinence warranted or is it irrationally extreme?

The Bible does not prohibit alcohol, but it does strongly discourage its overuse, and specifically drunkenness. So while the Bible cannot be the source of a final argument against alcohol, it does provide a foundation in that it notices that alcohol causes harm.

Ultimately, any rational argument for abstinence must be based on the fact that 10% of all social drinkers become alcoholics, totaling to about 10 million Americans and affecting one out of every three families. That is huge, and is reason enough to abstain altogether to spare that 10% and their families and their traffic victims all the grief that alcohol causes. The Bible simply points us in the right direction with its early warnings.

To play devil's advocate, I will mention that some new research claims that wine helps your heart. Well, maybe. But since Mormons and Adventists live 8 years longer on average than the general population, they must be doing something right and so I think I'll just stick with my abstinence, thank you. Whatever health benefits a daily cup of wine might offer is more than offset by a ruined liver. And it's not just my liver I'm concerned about, but my kid's and my grandkids as well. I'm betting that my example of abstinence will spare my family a lot of needless suffering over generations.

Okay, now to the matter at hand. What does the Bible say about alcohol? There are 247 Bible references to wine or strong drink. Here's a bunch of them though by no means all of them. Read, enjoy, then make up your own mind.

***Psalms 104:15** And wine that maketh glad the heart of man...*

Mormons, of course, are absolute tea-tottelers (except that we don't drink tea either). Clearly, the Bible is not so against imbibing as we are. We have no absolute scriptural argument against alcohol. What we do have, however, are absolute scriptural arguments against getting drunk, and, since 10% of all casual drinkers become alcoholics, the best way to insure that we don't produce Mormon alcoholics is to ban alcohol altogether. And that's a good thing. Glad hearts notwithstanding, we're better off without booze, and the drunken stupors, and the dead livers, and the traffic deaths. Who needs it?

***Proverbs 20:1** Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*

Alcohol makes you stupid (mocker, makes people laugh at you) and makes you angry (raging). Drinking alcohol is just not a wise thing to do.

***Proverbs 23:20** Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh. :21  
For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty...*

Alcohol makes you poor.

***Proverbs 23:31** Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. :32 At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. :33 Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.. :35 ...When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.*

When a person is under the influence, they lose their inhibitions and do things they wouldn't otherwise do. Regretted sex while under the influence is so common that it is a standard joke. And a favorite ploy for date rape is to get her drunk to loosen her up.

Most insidious of course is its addiction. When the drunk is finally sober, "awake," he or she just wants to get drunk again.

***Proverbs 31:4** It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink. :5 Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.*

The law and our justice system is often a casualty of drunkenness. Government leaders especially should not be drunk. How much mischief can a drunk senator cause — (Ted Kennedy?) — or a drunk judge, or a drunk cop?

***Proverbs 31:6** Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. :7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.*

There is so much said about who should *not* drink booze that there is little said about who *should* drink booze. This is the only verse that defends the drunk. Here are two justifications for getting snozzelled.

*First*, if you're dying. Back then, alcohol was the only pain killer and God is here saying, why deprive the dying of that merciful relief? Today doctors call it "snowing," get the dying patient so stoned on something that he or she can't feel the excruciating pain of dying. Our hospitals do it with a variety of drugs, morphine being the most used.

This verse is a strong argument against euthanasia. If God had wanted us to just kill the dying for mercy's sake, he wouldn't have prescribed booze, would he?

*Second*, the skid-row bum does have a right to get smashed. That's what it says: "Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." What's the point here? That you should get zonked every time you have a problem? No. But maybe we should be less judgmental of the real down-and-outers who have nothing left in life but a few gratifying moments of unconsciousness. It is the duty of priests and kings (and senators, Ted Kennedy) to not get drunk, but it is not the duty of skid-row bums.

***Ecclesiastes 10:17** Blessed are thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!*

*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 inflame them!

Morning drinkers are alcoholics.

*Isaiah 5:22* Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink.

*Isaiah 28:1* Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! :3 ... the drunkards of Ephraim...:7 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment.

God doesn't look favorable on drunks. An alcoholic, drug addicted government makes major mistakes

*Jeremiah 35:2* Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink. :5 ...and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. :6 But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever. :19 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.

God blesses this family for not drinking wine as their father had instructed. So while wine is a choice, leaving it alone seems to be a moral high ground. In this text anyway.

*Daniel 1:11* Then said Daniel... :12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. :15 And at the end of the ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. :16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine...

Daniel and his three friends made a good decision to not drink the wine or eat the king's less healthy food. If you have to choose between water and wine, take the water.

*Hosea 4:11* Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

An alcoholic or a drug addict will do anything to get their next high. Their heart has indeed been "taken away" and singularly directed to one thing.

*Hosea 7:5* ...sick with bottles of wine...

*Joel 1:5 Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.*

I guess the point is that when you're drunk you can believe anything. But when you're sober, you have to face the truth.

*Amos 2:12 But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.*

Part of the Nazarite vow was no alcohol. In that one way, anyway, Mormons and Adventists and others (Nazarenes, I supposed) are like the ancient Nazarites. They were not priests, not prophets, they were a cult apart, ascetics, not commanded in the Torah but defined in the Torah. So it does make sense then for some of today's churches to take a vow of abstinence. Such churches are consistent with the Biblical Nazarites.

*Zechariah 9:17 For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.*

Wine is a blessing from God, that's what the verse says. Sorry, teetotalers, you can't have everything your way.

*Luke 22:17 For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.*

There is no doubt that Jesus drank wine, not to get drunk, but at meals. There is no sin in drinking wine. The sin is the addiction and the drunkenness. The reason that Mormons and others abstain is because the sad reality is that one out of every ten casual drinkers becomes an alcoholic. That's too high a number to tolerate, and so we abstain. We're not passing judgment on casual drinkers and certainly not on Jesus, we're simply saying that we don't want to endure today's 10% casualty rate — that's a number too high for our liking and we'll pass, thank you.

*Romans 14:21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.*

This verse advises abstinence but for a strange reason. Not because wine is wrong but because other Christians might think it's wrong and so we want to accommodate their weaker faith. This seems a bit hypocritical. In other words, it's okay to drink but not when anyone is looking. Paul puts the best possible spin on it (for someone else's benefit) but the motive here is very tangled.

What makes this odd is that Paul elsewhere (*Galatians 2:11-14*) gave no quarter to Judah-izers who insisted that you can't be a true Christian unless you are also a Jew. Paul insisted on the opposite: you can't be a true Christian if you *are* a Jew, religiously speaking. Since Paul concedes nothing to Jewish Christians, why is he so accommodating

to tee totaling Christians? By the way, if Paul really meant it, why did he allow himself to be cajoled into going to the temple (*Acts 21:26*)? Not all issues are so black and white.

*Colossians 2:16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink...*

Now Paul says exactly the opposite. Before (*Romans 14:21*) Paul conceded to the teetotalers. But now he appears to draw a line and say, “Nobody is going to tell me what I can and cannot drink!” Or maybe he’s saying the opposite, “Timothy, if you want to be a teetotaler, that’s okay, no one should criticize you for that.”

*1 Timothy 5:23 Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.*

Timothy was a teetotaler. Otherwise why would Paul advise Timothy to drink some wine? No one argues with wine for medicinal purposes.

*Titus 2:1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: :2 That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate... :3 The aged women likewise, that they be...not given to much wine...*

“Much” wine is certainly different than just wine, and aged men and women are certainly not everyone. But still there is the overarching concern that alcohol is a source of problems and so, at the very least, needs to be moderated and used with caution.

There are Christians who believe there’s nothing wrong with wine and strong drink, and what was good for Jesus should be good for us. But that was a different age and what they meant by “sin” was not in all cases what we might mean by “sin.” In general, sin is that which injures, and I don’t need the Bible to tell me in every instance that a behavior injures when it is obvious. The Bible permitted slavery. We don’t today because we see more clearly the injury and injustice of it. Today we see more clearly that alcohol is *so* harmful (10% is not trivial) that I can’t imagine how anyone can have a grievance with abstinence. When a Christian abstains, that makes one less problem to deal with.