

Alcohol Guidelines

The purpose of this paper is to set out what we consider to be a reasonable approach to the issue of the consumption of alcohol, taking into account the direction and wisdom given to us in Scripture. In our responsibility for bringing practical care to the church, we want to provide what we consider to be helpful guidelines on this subject.

INTRODUCTION

Before we outline the aforementioned guidelines, it is important that the reader understand that this is not a paper addressing whether a Christian should or should not drink alcohol. That subject requires study in itself, and we would encourage people to give serious consideration to this matter and arrive at their own personal conviction as to whether or not it is right for them to consume alcohol. This paper is primarily addressed to those who have accepted that our position as a leadership is as follows:

- The Bible does not prohibit the consumption of alcohol.
- Wine was consumed throughout Biblical history, including by our Lord and the disciples, and the wine referred to in the Bible was evidently alcoholic.
- Though wine is sometimes spoken of negatively in the Bible, it is sometimes spoken of positively, and sometimes neutrally.
- The Bible warns us of the potential dangers of wine and the negative consequences of drunkenness.
- The Bible speaks against drunkards and drunkenness and in it we are commanded not to get drunk.

The subject of drinking alcohol is clearly addressed in Scripture. The scriptural warnings focus on the issue of excess and drunkenness, and challenge us with the need for moderation and self-control. However, in certain cultures, the social effects of excessive alcoholic consumption have caused a major reaction in both Government and Church. This has been most evidently seen in the U.S.A., with the laws of prohibition in the 1920's, and the continued prohibition of alcohol in much of the evangelical church of America today. With all the good intentions and Godly motives often expressed in this regard, it remains the fact that such prohibition is not found in Scripture. Our concern is that, in enforcing that which we cannot substantiate from Scripture, we are opening the door to an even more corrosive evil, that of legalism.

Our vision is for the local church to be established on the doctrine and practices of the New Testament. Our commitment is to be faithful to this in the midst of the shifting and changing attitudes of the day.

FREEDOM AND LICENSE

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." **Galatians 5:1**

Some would consider our stance on alcohol to be freeing and liberating from the more rigid position of abstinence that they have known. Where this response is genuine, we rejoice. However, it is important to point out that when Paul

warns in Galatians 5:13 '... do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh ...', it is because this can and does happen, resulting in slavery to habitual sin.

"Everything is permissible for me' – but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me' – but I will not be mastered by anything." 1 Corinthians 6:12.

The letter of Jude warns us in verse 4 of "godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality." Rather than this, we must be those who always remember that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:11-12).

We must also give consideration to our conduct before our brothers and sisters of differing conviction and vulnerability in relation to alcohol. Let it never be that we flaunt our freedom, but rather let us be happy to exercise loving restraint for the sake of the Kingdom. While Paul's position in Romans 14:5, in dealing with what he would consider a 'disputable matter', was that 'Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind', he goes on to give the direction in verse 13 to 'stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way'.

DRUNKENNESS

Whereas, from a Biblical basis, drinking alcohol in moderation cannot be called a sin, getting drunk clearly is. Before anyone enthusiastically embraces a new found freedom, we would do well to consider seriously what the Bible has to say about drunkenness. For example:

"Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags." Proverbs 23:20-21

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Galatians 5:19-21

"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Ephesians 5:8

"But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you." 1 Corinthians 5:11-12

Drunkenness is a serious issue and we are not to make light of it. God groups it with sins like idolatry, witchcraft and orgies! It is listed among those issues that would warrant the offender's expulsion from the church where there is no repentance and change. We do not underestimate the powerful hold that alcoholism can have on a person. Anyone who has been an alcoholic or has been close to someone who is or has been one, knows what it is to be dominated by alcohol and the devastating bondage that can result.

The approach of moderation is unlikely to be appropriate for anyone who has or has had alcoholic tendencies. We would state clearly that the safest and wisest way for someone with this type of history to proceed in their walk with God would be to abstain completely from all alcohol.

Furthermore, even for those who would not describe themselves as alcoholics, or exalcoholics, but have a tendency to drink excessively, we would strongly recommend abstinence. Anyone who has had any experience of deliberate drunkenness as a believer, or repeated instances of ‘accidental’ drunkenness, would do best to discuss this with one of the elders, and submit to the elders’ decision as to whether moderation or abstinence is the best for them. Anyone who is nervous about doing this probably has a drinking problem, or a Lordship issue! We would urge them to face it and be set free.

For those of us who genuinely have little temptation in this area, we should respect and encourage any individual who comes to the conviction that they should not drink alcohol. Indeed for some, it is the only right choice to make.

MODERATION

Because of the prevailing “no alcohol” policy in so many Christian circles in the U.S.A., little has been written on the subject of moderation. What constitutes ‘drunkenness’, or what is deemed an ‘excessive’ intake of alcohol, tends to be judged very subjectively. We are therefore putting forward the following simple guidelines to cut through the vagueness and to bring some objectivity and helpful direction:

1. We must be diligent to obey the righteous laws of the land, particularly as they relate to the consumption of alcohol by minors.
2. An appropriately small amount of alcohol should have little effect on most people. In this regard, the studies on the influence of alcohol as it relates to driving, and the consequent legal limits, are a helpful guideline for us. We should never drink to the extent that we would be considered over the limit to drive.
3. Even the above guideline can become confusing when approached subjectively. Factors such as body mass, food intake and the length of time over which alcohol is imbibed can all be brought into the equation. Furthermore, someone who has become used to consuming large amounts of alcohol and/or is an excessively frequent drinker may claim that the amount of alcohol they can consume without adverse effects is higher than for the average person (though we would say that such a statement is, in and of itself, somewhat self-condemning on this issue). Therefore, to bring a further degree of helpful objectivity, we would like to put forward what we believe to be a reasonable maximum amount of alcohol, to avoid ‘excessive’ intake. We would question the appropriateness of anyone having in excess of two ‘drinks’ over the course of an evening, or an equivalent period.

By a ‘drink’, we mean:

- I. One beer
 - II. One glass of wine
 - III. One standard measure of stronger alcohol (e.g., a shot)
 - IV. Accordingly, one alcoholic beverage containing two shots should itself be seen as enough for an evening.
4. We believe that there can be cause for concern where a Christian frequently drinks alcohol on a regular basis (e.g., several times during any given week), even if he/she never has more than a ‘moderate’ amount on any given occasion. It suggests a tendency towards dependency, or at very least is far from being conducive to an exemplary lifestyle. Again, this is not a rule, but if it seems unreasonable to you, perhaps it’s time to test your heart on the subject.

BEING EXAMPLES OF – AND PROVOCATIONS TO – GODLINESS

We are called to ‘spur one another on toward love and good deeds’ (Hebrews 10:24) and, like Timothy, to ‘set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity’ (1 Timothy 4:12). This includes our approach to alcohol. Not only should our conduct be above reproach, but so should our speech. We should not speak, even in

jest, in a way that improperly advocates alcohol, let alone drunkenness. Nor should our homes suggest that alcohol plays a dominant, or even significant, role in our lives.

Please understand that our purpose is neither to impose unreasonable restrictions or ‘laws’ on anyone, nor to advocate the drinking of alcohol. However, as those who care for you and who must give an account to God for you, we want to make as clear as possible what we consider to be a moderate and responsible use of alcohol. Our prayer is that this will help you in your radical pursuit of our Holy God.

CONCLUDING EXPLANATION OF THESE PAPERS

This is one of a series of papers that have been written by those responsible for establishing the practical outworking of Biblical doctrine and wisdom for One Church Ministries. Although these papers are a result of much Biblical study and many years of Christian leadership, they are neither designed to be comprehensive, nor the final word on any given subject. However, we have endeavored to succinctly outline our practice based on our current understanding of the Scriptures. It is not suggested that these papers be substituted in any way for individual continued study of these subjects, but we pray that they will serve the churches in bringing clarity regarding our current understanding and the resulting practical outworking of our care.

About One Church Ministries (OCM)

One Church Ministries administrates the care and equipping of local churches by Ephesians 4 ministries, currently led by the apostolic ministry of John C. Lalgee.

The goals of One Church Ministries

- To bring to maturity and effectively care for a God-determined number of local churches birthed through or adopted by OCM
- To influence the wider Church by way of resource and example.
- To raise up and release Ephesians 4 ministries.

