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Drinking Alcohol - What does the Bible say about it?

Question: Hello I just came across your website in my search for some answers to a question. I enjoy your website, it seems to uplift and revolve around to the only truth we have, the Bible. It is essential that we have the "sword" to fight spiritual battles in the name of Jesus and to carry out what He has asked of us. I had a question about something, I thought maybe you could help me on. I know that it is written that *God is the same today, yesterday, and tomorrow*. Also He who wrote the Old Testament, through the Holy Spirit, wrote the New Testament. It is written in the book of **Proverbs 20:1** that **"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is ragging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise"**. Also in **2 Peter 1:1-7** namely verse 6 the scriptures say **"add to your knowledge, temperance."** My question is: Are Christians allowed to drink wine or strong drink?

Answer: Before I answer your question, I would like to cover a point that you made mention of. It is true that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. God has always been, is and will always be: omnipotent, infallible, holy, righteous, just, merciful, omniscient, and omnipresent. He doesn't get old, sick or suffer from psychological problems. **Numbers 23:19** *"God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent. Has He said, and shall he not do it? Or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"* So we see that God says what He means and means what He says. He does not make idle promises. God is concerned about His word and takes what He says seriously. Look at these four scriptural examples:

1. **Deuteronomy 18:20-22** *But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.* Notice in verse 20 what the pronouncement God made about any prophet that said things that God did not say and attributed it to God.
2. **Matthew 5:18-19** *For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* Every little detail is important and we know this because God said so.
3. **2 Timothy 2:15** *Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* We must study it for there is a danger of mishandling the Word due to lack of study and familiarity.
4. **Psalms 119.** This Psalms is a perfect chapter to let us know how we should view, study and treat God's word.

I have an example of what some call a discrepancy in the Bible when they site the premise that God does not change. Here is a question. How old did a Levite have to be before he was inducted into the work of the Priesthood? **Numbers 4:3** says 30 years. **Numbers 8:23** says 25 years of age and **1 Chronicles 23:27** says 20 years old. There are people who get hung up on this and say, "God says

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he doesn't change but here we have change so either God is a liar or the Bible is full of errors." Neither conclusion is valid. This is not one of those unchangeable points. This was the reduction of age to have adequate manning for the positions and jobs the Levites did.

When you hear someone start a question or a conversation with, if God is unchangeable, then why..." The nature of God is changeless. The way God addresses issues may vary from time to time and from person to person now and in the Bible. For instance, we started out with a sacrificial system using animals and since the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary; this has become non-existent and useless. Remember you cannot make God a two dimensional being that has no flexibility in the universe. Putting God in box is a bad way to start off interpreting scripture. Remember, God is a sovereign God, He does as He wills. You may ask what all of this has to do with your question. Hang in there with me. This is laying the groundwork for the answer to your question.

To answer your question about wine, strong drink, drunkenness etc., it will be necessary to lay down some ground rules for this study that applies to all studies of any subject in the Bible. When we look at a topic, we need to look at everything the scriptures say about that topic. For example if you were going to study wine, you would need to check your Bible from Genesis to Revelation to see what is said about it. Second, we must be careful to examine each scripture in its context and take note of what we have learned from this passage. Third, we must be willing to apply ourselves and do the study. That may mean some time in the books, dictionaries, commentaries and other materials. Forth, we must be willing accept what the scriptures reveal and make this what we "believe on the subject." Fifth, many subjects in the Bible are like a fine jewel. They have many facets and many sides and cannot be easily reduced to a yes or no. Some are clear and have a definite yes or no easily found like the two sides of a coin. Sixth, the Bible is its own best interpreter. The scriptures harmonize beautifully about the many subjects that they cover. If you interpret scripture in such a way that it causes the Bible to contradict itself, then you have improperly interpreted the passage. Remember scripture harmonizes with scripture.

Your question was on wine and or strong drink and the apparent discrepancies that are found between scriptures like **Proverbs 20:1** "*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise*", on one hand and scriptures like **1 Timothy 5:23** "*Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities*", on the other hand. Some see a contradiction here in that the first verse is viewed by some as a universal condemnation of wine and others see the verse in Timothy as "the key to the liquor cabinet". Here we must remember that applying any meaning to a verse that makes the Bible contradict itself is wrong. When you make the Bible contradict itself you are actually saying basically two things. One, the Bible contains errors. Two, God has contradicted Himself and is therefore a liar.

The words for wine and new wine in the Old Testament and the New Testament all carry the meaning of a fermented beverage. I have looked at several conservative scholarly sources over the years and this is a fact. The use of the words in the OT and NT bear this out. For a scriptural proof of this understanding of the term of new wine, see Acts 2:1-15. Both the Hebrew and Greek terms used for Wine refers to a fermented beverage.

The main source of confusion on this subject or any other is when we pick a

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position or a belief and then find scriptures to support our position and conveniently overlook those that do not support our beliefs. This is what many cults do with the Bible. They pick and choose verses that agree with what they agree with and ignore the rest. This method is backwards. It's not, "Here is what I believe now let me find some Bible to back it up." It is supposed to be, "Here is what the Bible says and this is what I now believe!" Lets take a look at scriptures through the Bible and see if we can begin understand what God said on the subject.

The following scriptures are enough of a sampling from the Bible that will allow us to see how the subject of drinking and wine is viewed in the Bible.

Genesis 9:21

*And he drank of the **wine**, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.*

This is the first mention of wine in the Bible. This episode of Noah's drunkenness ended up in Noah wishing a curse upon his youngest son. Remember that Noah was seen as a highly favored individual in God's eyes. He grew a vineyard, made wine and drank it. This is what the Bible says. We also see that it carried some negative consequences with it.

Genesis 14:18

*And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and **wine**: and he was the priest of the most high God.*

Notice that we have here, Abraham and Melchizedek sharing in a meal with bread and wine. Wine was apparently used commonly as a drink. Here, it is given in hospitality to Abraham by Melchizedek.

Genesis 19:33

*And they made their father drink **wine** that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.*

We see wine used as a tool for evil. Lots daughters used this as a means for incest.

Genesis 27:28

*Therefore, God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and **wine**:*

This was the blessing of Isaac to his son Jacob. One of the things he prayed for was an abundance of wine. We see no hesitancy here in Isaac asking for an abundance of this for his son. Wine was a valuable commodity.

Numbers 6:3

*He shall separate himself from **wine** and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of **wine**, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.*

Here we have a section of scripture that deals with Nazarite vows. Part of the vows involved staying away from strong (alcoholic) drinks as well as not cutting your hair or even eating a grape.

Numbers 6:20

*And the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD: this is holy for the priest, with the wave breast and heave shoulder: and after that the Nazarite may drink **wine**.*

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Most of the time the vows were temporary in nature and after a set time the Nazarite could drink wine.

Numbers 28:7

*And the drink offering thereof shall be the fourth part of a hin for the one lamb: in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong **wine** to be poured unto the LORD for a drink offering.*

Wine was seen as a fit drink offering to be offered to God.

Deuteronomy 7:13

*And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy **wine**, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee.*

Wine was in a list of things that God would bless his people with.

Deuteronomy 14:26

*And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for **wine**, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,*

At the time of bringing the tithe to the Levites, you were allowed to purchase as fancy as meal as you desired and drink what ever you wanted. Notice that the catch was that “*and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household.*” Strong drink was permitted, but notice that God set some parameters on it.

Deuteronomy 21:20-21

*And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a **glutton, and a drunkard**. 21 And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.*

In light of the above verse where we see that God set aside a time of rejoicing, worship and “partying” as it were. Constantly being a partier outside of “God’s party schedule” had a deadly outcome. Drunkenness and gluttony were seen as a sin.

Judges 13:7

*But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no **wine** nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death.*

This is a case where the Nazarite vow was imposed on a person. For this person, wine was never an option. This happens to be Samson who is being referred to here.

Nehemiah 2:1

*And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that **wine** was before him: and I took up the **wine**, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.*

Nehemiah was a cupbearer. Part of his job was to taste all of the king’s drinks to make sure none of them were poison.

Proverbs 20:21

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is

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not wise.

Here we have a warning about drinking to drunkenness and drinking too much of the time. From this we can gather that this gift from God was being abused. Just as sex is a gift from God and has been abused, so has many of the good things that God has given us.

Proverbs 23:17

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

Excessive drinking leads to being addicted to alcohol and the myriad of physical and mental issues that comes with it. People destroy their lives, hurt family and friends and remain forever impoverished due to this.

Proverbs 23:21

*For the **drunkard and the glutton** shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.*

Excessive drinking and eating is condemned and a warning to those who do is issued. This also gives us insight as to what these behaviors cause and how people see this type of person.

Proverbs 31:4-7

*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, **it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.** Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and **wine** unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more*

Proverbs 31 is what many recognize as the location of the scriptures that describe the "Proverbs 31 Woman", however there are a few scriptures before that segment of chapter 31 that need to be pulled into this study. Let us examine verses 4 to 7.

Verses 4 and 5 warn of the dangers of ones who are in responsible positions and their use of wine because of its effects on one's judgment.

Verses 6 and 7 deal with the medicinal use of wine, note that the instructions are for one to give wine to one who is very sick or is suffering from a great depression on the scale of the loss of a spouse or child. A review of the historical understanding of the Rabbi's use of wine as related to this scripture confirms this. This is not instruction for "self-medication." Alcohol is not to be used to treat depression that is a result of failing to seek God's peace as cited in scriptures such as Philippians 4:4-9 or Romans 14:17-19. The concept of self-administered "drinking" to deal with depression or life's problems is a foreign concept to the Bible.

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!***

Drunkenness and being a drunkard is condemned.

Isaiah 28:7

*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.*

Drunkenness and being a drunkard is condemned again. Some of the problems with it are listed.

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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.

Drunkenness and being a drunkard is condemned again.

John 2:9

When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

Jesus first miracle involved the creation of wine out of water.

Acts 2:13

Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

This passage shows that the term new wine does mean a fermented beverage.

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.

Here is one of the most powerful verses in the Bible concerning the drinking of wine. If in doing so you will cause a brother to stumble or you cause confusion or offense to a weaker Christian, then DO NOT DO IT! This is especially true of anyone whose drinking has a negative impact on his or her family. This is not only wine but anything else!

1 Timothy 3:3

Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

Here the word for wine does not appear in the Greek. The word is *paroiknos* and it's meaning is "excessive drinker" or "one addicted to wine"

1 Timothy 3:8

Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

Deacons or ones in leadership were limited in their consumption.

1 Timothy 5:23

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

Here Paul tells Timothy to use wine sparingly for his stomach and other infirmities. Again this is not the proverbial key to the liquor cabinet.

Titus 1:7

For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre.

Again, here the word for wine does not appear in the Greek. The word is *paroiknos* and it's meaning is "excessive drinker" or "one addicted to wine"

Titus 2:3

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.

Leadership is limited in this area of consumption. In light of Romans 14:21 may be prohibited totally.

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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.*

Excess of wine is listed as a sin. Lack of self-control in other areas are also listed.

Where does this leave the Christian today? There are many scriptures that deal with this subject. You can pick and choose from among them and build an argument for total abstinence from all alcohol. You can also take the same Bible and build a case for drinking alcohol anytime you want and as much as you want. A third alternative is to be true to the scriptures and follow what THE BIBLE teaches on the subject. There seems to be no absolute prohibition against drinking wine. There are stipulations and limitations put on this. These need to be examined and obeyed. There are other factors that we must take into consideration in this area. We have an identity in Christ and a responsibility to other believers in the world. We are to look at the whole of who we are in Christ and how we are to grow in Him. Our lives and actions have an impact on others. Read the following passages with the above thoughts in mind.

2 Peter 1:1-7 *Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:*

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

*6 And to knowledge temperance; and to **temperance** patience; and to patience godliness;*

7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

It is to be noted here that some understand temperance in verse 6 to mean drinking. This is due to the Temperance Movement in the early 1900's that lead to Prohibition. The word here is *enkrateia*. The word is not specifically aimed at drinking but more of an overall self-control, which would include drinking, gluttony, sexual sins, and any other abuse of the abilities and gifts God has given to man.

1 Corinthians 6:12 *All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

Paul here is warning of the liberty of doing something versus the benefit or usefulness of it. The last part of the verse warns that over exercise of some of these freedoms can lead to bondage by the abuse thereof. Just because you can do something it may not be a good thing to do, at least that is the way Paul saw it. In drinking, do you run the risk of drunkenness and/or becoming an alcoholic, which God expressly has said is BAD.

Romans 14:1 – 15:3 *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful*

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disputations.

2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

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.

22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

15:1 *We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*

2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

In this analysis, you must ask yourself whether consuming wine or any alcohol is going to put you in violation of this passage of scripture. In chapter 15 verse 1, the scriptural admonition is quite clear about who should be considered in

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matters like this.

There are many things in the Bible that are clearly defined as a sin. Fornication, robbery, idolatry, lying, lust, being a drunkard and many other sins are clearly defined as wrong. In this case, in the end analysis, it is not the wine that is the problem. It is the consumer of the wine. There is no simple **yes** or **no** answer to this question as to whether drinking a glass of wine is wrong. This is something that you must work out between you and God in light of all He has revealed in his word. You must answer to God for the decisions you make. You must look at where God has put you and what He has entrusted you with.