

Medicinal Use of Alcohol

When the subject of “alcohol and the Bible” comes up, it is common that passages related to the medicinal use of alcohol also come up, along with various studies about the possible health benefits of the regular, moderate use of alcohol. What do these passages and scientific studies teach us?

In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul recommended that Timothy use *a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities*. Clearly, wine was the simplest solution for Timothy's current condition. Paul was not recommending it as a general “health drink,” as some claim it is. Today, we do the same when we take cough medicine that contains alcohol. People who drink Budweiser for the pleasure but claim it is for their illness will answer to God for abusing His Word.

Proverbs 31:6-7 recommends intoxicating drink for *him who is perishing and bitter of heart*. This is the same person, just as in verse 2 “my son,” “the son of my womb,” and “son of my vows” is the same person and in verse 4 “not for kings to drink wine” means the same as “nor for princes intoxicating drink.” This repetition (called “parallelism”) is found throughout Proverbs. Clearly, God permits the pain associated with death to be dulled by wine (alcohol). Today, morphine is often given for the same purpose. This proverb neither justifies the social, moderate use of morphine or alcohol.

On a regular basis, a newspaper or evening news program will refer to the results of the latest study which concludes that drinking wine or beer has certain health benefits. For some people, that's all they need to hear in order to feel good about their drinking. However, it is almost as common for similar studies to reach different conclusions. Here's a statement from the website of the Mayo Clinic:

Moderate alcohol consumption may provide some health benefits. It may:

- Reduce your risk of developing and dying from heart disease
- Possibly reduce your risk of ischemic stroke (when the arteries to your brain become narrowed or blocked, causing severely reduced blood flow)
- Possibly reduce your risk of diabetes

Even so, the evidence about the possible health benefits of alcohol isn't certain, and alcohol may not benefit everyone who drinks.

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/alcohol/art-20044551>, accessed 5-26-14

Notice the lack of certainty in this statement—“may provide... It may..., possibly..., isn't certain...” The blanket statement that “moderate alcohol consumption is good for your health” is not a scientific fact. The facts show that for every possible health benefit you can name for drinking alcohol, there is also some health risk or damage.

A study released in mid-July (2009, *dh*), for instance, found that moderate alcohol consumption reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease in women by increasing the amount of “good” cholesterol in the bloodstream and reducing blood sugar levels.

But other studies have linked a daily drink, most often wine, to reduced risk of dementia, bone loss and physical disabilities related to old age. Wine also has been found to increase life expectancy and provide potential protection against some forms of cancer, including esophageal cancer and lymphoma.

But don't invest in that case of Pinot noir just yet.

Experts with the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association say that though these studies do show some benefits to moderate drinking, the health risks from alcohol consumption far outweigh the potential rewards.

Drinking any alcohol at all is known to increase your risk for contracting a number of types of cancer, said Susan Gapstur, vice president of epidemiology for the American Cancer Society. These include cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, liver, colon/rectum and breast.

<http://consumer.healthday.com/general-health-information-16/misc-alcohol-news-13/drinking-your-way-to-health-perhaps-not-629696.html>, accessed 5-26-14

If you are going to base your personal habits upon science's "stamp of approval," then what will you do with science's stamps of disapproval? Will you also justify the personal, moderate use of marijuana, cocaine, LSD, ecstasy, and ketamine (street name is "Special K")? Apparently, certain chemicals in all of these "party drugs" do or may have some health benefits. Some studies also show that cursing, gambling, sex (which includes sex outside of marriage), same sex marriage, and smoking have or may have health benefits. (If you would like my sources for these studies and statements, contact me or do your own internet search)

Clearly, if we are trying to please God, we cannot base our life upon the studies and conclusions of scientists. What we must do is go to the Bible to find out whether the way we are seeking pleasure or good health has God's approval. Yes, God approves of alcohol being used to treat an illness, but once the illness is over so is the need for alcohol. Yes, God approves of alcohol being used in the case of someone who we believe is dying, but if they surprisingly recover, where is God's approval for the ongoing use of the drink? Yes, God has given permission for the medicinal use of alcohol, but let's be sure we are not rewriting His prescription.

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