

Personal Questions that the Bible Answers

What does the Bible say about drinking alcohol? Is it sinful?

Scripture has much to say regarding the drinking of alcohol. **Question 1** Can you recall instances in the Old or New Testament that mention the drinking of an alcoholic beverage? . . .

Q. Do you remember the phrase “*Eat, drink, and be merry*”? Does it come from Shakespeare? Where does it come from?

A. The Parable of the Rich Man from Luke 12:19 (see below).

Let’s read a few relevant passages about drinking alcohol — some *promote* it while some *rebuke* it: [Leviticus 10:9](#); [Numbers 6:3](#); [Judges 13:4, 7](#); [Proverbs 20:1](#); [Isaiah 5:11, 22](#); [28:7–8](#) MSG; [Luke 12:19](#).

So far, from all that we see in God’s holy Word, Scripture doesn’t *necessarily* forbid a Christian from drinking beer, wine, or any other drink containing alcohol.

In fact, some passages of Scripture discuss alcohol *positively*:

- [Ecclesiastes 9:7](#) instructs, “*Drink your wine with a merry heart.*”
- [Psalm 104:14–15](#) states that God gives wine “*that makes glad the heart of men.*”
- [Amos 9:14](#) discusses drinking wine from your own vineyard as a sign of God’s blessing.
- [Isaiah 55:1](#) encourages Israelites, “*Yes, come buy wine and milk without money...*” to join in the feast God had prepared for them.

Q. Does God’s Word forbid Christians from drinking alcohol?

A. Many of the world’s religions forbid alcoholic consumption for a variety of reasons. These religions are a few that *ban* alcoholic consumption: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and Mormons.

However, some Christian religions *permit* alcohol consumption.

Q. Does the Bible say anything *specific* about drinking alcohol?

A. God commands Christians **do three things regarding alcohol.**

- First, to *avoid drunkenness* ([Eph. 5:18](#)). Scriptures condemn drunkenness and its effects ([Proverbs 23:29-35](#) MSG).
- Secondly, God commands Christians to not allow their bodies to become “mastered” by anything ([1 Corinthians 6:12](#); [2 Peter 2:19](#)). Drinking alcohol in excess is undeniably addictive.
- Thirdly, Scripture also forbids a Christian from doing anything that might offend other Christians or encourage them to sin against their conscience [e.g., meat] ([1 Corinthians 8:9–13](#)).

In light of these three principles, it would be extremely difficult for any Christian to say that he or she is *drinking alcohol in excess* in order to glorify God ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)).

Q. How about Jesus who changed water into wine? Does the Bible tell us if he ever *drank* wine, beer, or a fermented beverage?

A. There’s no outright declaration that Jesus actually drank alcohol. Nevertheless, he certainly could have!

I discovered a relevant fact about drinking alcohol in Jesus’ day.

Q. How clean do you think the drinking water was then? **A.** In New Testament times, *water wasn’t very clean*. Without modern sanitation, it was often filled with bacteria, viruses, and other contaminants.

Back in Jesus’ day, because drinking water wasn’t clean or healthy to drink and couldn’t effectively be refrigerated, people often drank wine or grape juice because it was far less likely to be contaminated. In Apostle Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he suggested a surprising remedy for Timothy’s frequent stomach problems and illnesses. In **1 Timothy 5:23**, Paul instructed Timothy to

stop drinking water exclusively (which was probably causing his stomach problems) and instead drink *wine*.

It's important to realize that Paul regards differences in drinking alcohol as secondary* issues. Yet Christians oftentimes become divided over drinking alcohol. But, because drinking alcohol isn't a primary* issue, let's agree to disagree about it.

In The Message version, Eugene Peterson translates **1 Timothy 5:23** more directly: "*Go ahead and drink a little wine, for instance; it's good for your digestion, good medicine for what ails you.*"

In those days, wine was fermented; it contained alcohol. I learned that their wine's alcohol-by-volume level wasn't as high as today's.

I also learned that it's incorrect to assume *they were drinking grape juice instead of wine*. Neither is incorrect to say that *their wine was similar to wine commonly drunk today*. Wine, then, didn't have as much alcohol content as today's wine.

Q. Knowing all this, do Scriptures forbid today's Christians from drinking beer or wine? . . . **Q.** How about other drinks containing high alcohol content, such as tequila, vodka, rum, or those whiskeys having more than 90 percent alcohol by volume? . . .

Q. Is one's drinking of alcohol tainted as being sinful? **A.** No. **What is sinful is** allowing occasional consumption of alcohol to develop into **drunkenness and addiction** to it. That's what a Christian must *absolutely* refrain from doing!

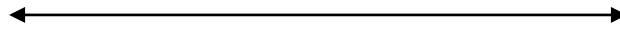
Alcohol, consumed in small quantities, is neither harmful nor addictive for most people — the exception being those who struggle with addiction and are easily tempted by Satan.

I learned, too, that some doctors advocate drinking small amounts of *red* wine for its health benefits, especially heart health.

It's often best for a Christian to abstain from drinking alcohol for these reasons:

- (1) There are many biblical concerns and warnings regarding alcohol and its effects
- (2) We might cause people to easily be tempted to consume alcohol in excess
- (3) It's also very possible that our drinking can enable a brother or sister to prioritize their intake of alcohol instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit of Jesus.

Bottom line: *Occasional, careful, and private consumption* of small quantities of alcohol is a matter of "Christian freedom." However, drunkenness and addiction are sins.



In Conclusion

Question:

What does the Bible say about drinking alcohol? Is it sinful?

Answer: Like food and so many other *secondary issues* we find in the Bible, the issue of alcohol is not one of total prohibition; rather, it's one of moderation.

The Bible allows Christians to partake of alcohol in a responsible way. Because Jesus saw nothing wrong with people drinking a little wine now and then, we should see nothing wrong with doing so as well.

In fact, the Scriptures see alcohol's occasional, moderate consumption as a blessing "*that gladdens man's heart*" and encourages relaxation, happiness, and laughter.



* Open and print Warren's "[Primary and Secondary Theologies](#)."