

Drugs and Alcohol

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[*Unless otherwise noted, the American Standard Version is used for all quotes from scripture.]

The National Institute on Drug Abuse has cited the following regarding the use of illicit drugs in the United States.

In 1999, about 14.8 million Americans were current users of illicit drugs, meaning they used an illicit drug at least once during the month prior to being interviewed for the latest National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, an annual nationwide survey among Americans age 12 and older. About 3.5 million were dependent on illicit drugs; and additional 8.2 million were dependent on alcohol (1).

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, there were 19,102 deaths from drug-induced causes in 1999 from legal and illegal drugs. The month prior to being interviewed in 1999, 7% of youth ages 12-17 had smoked marijuana. In 2000, 21.6% of high school seniors had done the same. In addition, 1.9 % of persons ages 18-25 had used cocaine the month before being interviewed in 1999, while 2.1% of high school seniors interviewed in 2000 had done so. Also in 2000, 2.2% of high school seniors had used inhalants the previous month (*Illegal Drug...1*). Regarding alcohol use, the same agency reported 19,171 alcohol-induced deaths in the United States each year, not including motor vehicle fatalities. There were 26,259 deaths in 1999 from chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, which was the twelfth leading cause of death in the United States. They also reported that 52% of Americans twelve and over interviewed in 1999 had drank alcohol in the previous month. Of those, 15% were "binge drinkers," consuming five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in the previous month (*Alcohol Use...1*).

One can see that the twenty-first century American society has a drug habit. When considering alcohol and drugs, one should understand that this is not two problems, but one. For alcohol is a drug.

Therefore, drug and alcohol use and abuse will be considered together. The problem, of course, does not include the proper use of drugs for medicinal purposes, but misuse and recreational purposes. Jesus approved the use of a physician to maintain good health (Luke 5:31). That would include approval of the methods and practices available to the physician who has the well being of the individual in mind.

According to the controlled substance act of 1971, there are five categories of drugs. Sedatives and tranquilizers act as a depressant to the central nervous system, along with barbiturates and alcohol, which is the most widely known and used of these. "Some have falsely thought alcohol to be a stimulant because after a few drinks the subject feels he can perform amazing feats. This is of course due to the euphoria produced by the central nervous system sedation" (Alls 48). As with others in this category, alcohol is addictive. According to the *Infoplease Almanac*, "...nearly 14 million Americans — 1 in every 13 adults — abuse alcohol or are alcoholic. Several million more adults engage in risky drinking patterns that could lead to alcohol problems" (Infoplease 1). Stimulants, such as amphetamines, cocaine, and caffeine speed up the nervous system. These drugs do not cause physical addiction, but psychological dependence (Alls 58). A third category is that of narcotics, such as heroin, morphine and codeine. These, under proper direction, of course, have a use in our society as pain relievers. They are classified as central nervous system depressants. They are highly addictive (Alls 39-40). Fourth are the hallucinogens, such as mescaline and LSD. These cause change in perception and consciousness. Similarly, the fifth category is the cannabis, such as marijuana and hashish. These alter the mood, thinking, and behavior of the individual. Some place these in with the hallucinogens. All of these drugs are either physically or psychologically addictive. All of them, when abused, can cause harm to the individual, even resulting in death.

When one considers the health costs, the destruction of property, the loss of work, and other costs related to this problem of alcohol and drugs, one can understand the tremendous drain on the economy. In addition, when one considers the homes and individuals that are ruined by alcohol and drugs, one understands the great destructiveness of this problem. However, there is a matter of far greater importance that one should consider. Not only can alcohol and drugs destroy an individual's life and family here on this earth, it can bring one's eternal soul to destruction, which is far worse. For a man's soul is worth more than all the world (Matthew 16:26).

Consider now this twenty-first century problem in view of first century ethics as revealed in the word of God, the Bible.

First Century Ethics Regarding Alcohol and Drugs

There is no doubt or argument that the Bible warns of strong drink and condemns drunkenness. Wine is called a mocker (Proverbs 20:1) and brings one to poverty (Proverbs 21:17; Proverbs 23:21). It causes contentions and brings sorrow (Proverbs 23:29-30). It distorts thinking and behavior (Proverbs 23:30-35; Proverbs 31:4-7). Paul warns that one should not walk in drunkenness (Romans 13:13), and he lists drunkenness as one of the works of the flesh which will condemn one's soul (Galatians 5:19-21). After all, the recreational use of alcohol and drugs is for the very purpose of

fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. Paul makes it clear that one is not to make “provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).

Those warnings are just as valid for other drugs. For they, too, are mockers. They bring one to poverty and sorrow, cause contentions, and distort thinking and behavior. Also, The term drunkenness merely indicates intoxication. According to Strong, the Greek word, *methai*, drunkenness (Galatians 5:19-21), is “apparently a primary word; an intoxicant, i.e. (by implication) intoxication.” Intoxication is “an abnormal state that is essentially a poisoning,” and poison is “a substance that through its chemical action usually kills, injures, or impairs an organism” (Webster’s Dictionary). Intoxication, therefore, or drunkenness, applies quite well in the case of other drugs. They produce an “abnormal state” as a result of the poisoning. One could, also, argue the case of condemnation of the use of drugs from the term “sorcery” that is listed among the works of the flesh condemned by Paul (Galatians 5:19-21). “Sorcery” is from the Greek word, *farmakeia*, from which we get our word pharmacy. Vines defines the word, “(Eng., ‘pharmacy,’ etc.) primarily signified the use of medicine, drugs, spells; then, poisoning; then, sorcery” (Vol. IV, 51). Certainly it is in a different context, but “sorcery,” as Paul used it, included the misuse of medicines, drugs. Therefore, it could be concluded that his use of the term condemns the misuse and abuse today, even if it is in a different context.

In addition to the outright condemnation of the use of drugs, including alcohol, there are other reasons that the Christian should not partake of such on a recreational basis.

As mentioned earlier, all these drugs are addictive either physically or psychologically. That means that one comes under the control of the drug and is not in full control of self. In addition, the drugs usually effect the ability of the user to think clearly and rationally, to react normally, and behave ordinarily. All of this describes one who is no longer in control but is being controlled. This does not mean one is forced or overwhelmed, but that one has yielded himself/herself to another master, a chemical substance (Romans 6:16). No one is forced to misuse or abuse these drugs. The choice is made by the individual to do so. One does not have to go very far, then, before he/she is under the control of the drug. The Christian is to be under the control of God, as His servant. Jesus said that one cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24), and Paul made it clear that one is not to be brought under the control of anything other than God, even if it is an expedient (1 Corinthians 6:12). One enslaved to these drugs, one brought under the power of these drugs, is no longer yielding oneself to the control of God, but to a chemical substance.

The Christian belongs to God and should use His body with this in mind. Paul wrote, “Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). From this passage one understands that the Christian’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. One does not belong to oneself, but to God. Therefore, the Christian is to glorify God in the body. Can one really think one can defile the temple of the Holy Spirit with mind altering drugs and be pleasing to God? Can one actually think one can glorify God in one’s body while under the influence of mind altering drugs? The Christian, realizing that his physical body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and is to be used to the glory of God, will not defile it with drugs used to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, drugs which destroy the body God has given.

The above consideration logically leads to another problem with the use of drugs. If one is not glorifying God when using alcohol and drugs, that one is not a shining light unto others (Matthew 5:16). Even in matters of expediency, the apostle Paul makes it clear that one sins against others and against Christ when one becomes a stumbling block to them (1 Corinthians 8:9, 12). It should be evident, then, that one likewise sins against those they influence and against Christ as a user of drugs.

Finally, the Christian should observe that the government is ordained of God and is to be obeyed (Romans 13:1-2; 1 Peter 2:13). In the case of most drugs, it is against the law of the land to use them for recreational purposes. Alcohol, of course, is one exception to that, though it is illegal to drive with blood levels of alcohol above a certain percent. It does not matter whether the drug is a legal drug being misused or an illegal drug used for recreational purposes, it is against the law of the land and, therefore, against the law of God.

One can, therefore, clearly understand that the use of alcohol and/or drugs is condemned by God. The use of such is a work of the flesh, replaces God as one's master, destroys the temple of God, causes one to sin against others, and is illegal according to civil law, thus sinful.

What about Social Drinking?

However, many view the occasional drink of alcohol in a different light. These agree that drunkenness is condemned, but they rationalize that drinking small amounts of alcoholic beverage is not.

The American society is a drinking society. One might feel out of place at a business luncheon or a social gathering unless one drinks lightly with the others. Some have even lost employment because of a refusal to do so when it is expected in business. Others think an occasional drink at the restaurant or at home is of no harm. If it were not against civil laws, one might even try to make the same argument for the occasional use of some drugs, such as marijuana.

One argument often appealed to for approval of such actions is that Jesus turned the water to wine at the wedding feast (John 2:1-11). One cannot, however, hastily conclude that the "wine" produced by the miracle of Jesus was fermented and alcoholic in nature, thus intoxicating. The term *oinos*, translated wine, was used in various ways, not always meaning a fermented drink.

"Nothing is clearer to those who have studied this question than that the Hebrew word *yain* and the Greek word *oinos* were, as Professor Sir R. Jebb says of *oinos*, general words in those early days, and were used to describe sometimes the fruit on the vines, the juice in the grapes, the juice when it was being pressed out, when it was preserved in an unfermented state and therefore unintoxicating, and when it was fermented and intoxicating" (De Welt 326).

De Welt went on to give examples of different uses in antiquity: Anacreon wrote some five hundred years, B.C., "Only males tread the grapes, setting free the *oinos* (wine);" Varro spoke of "gathering wine," Columella of "unintoxicating wine," and Cato of "hanging wine (grapes on the vine)." Ovid said,

“And scarce can the grapes contain the wine they have within” (326-27). Some have argued that there was no method in antiquity that allowed preservation of the unfermented juice. Jeffcoat gives several methods in antiquity by which the process of fermentation could be prevented so that the juice of the grape was kept or preserved fresh (31-35). Regarding John 2:10, some take the term “drunk freely (ASV)” or “well drunk (KJV)” to mean they were intoxicated, implying, therefore, that what Jesus produced would have been the same. Jeffcoat, on the other hand, consulted forty-three versions or translations of the Bible and found eighteen different renderings of the phrase, all of which stressed quantity rather than quality (41). Also, even without the above considerations, one can know without a doubt that what Jesus produced was unfermented juice of the grape. Habakkuk makes it clear that one who would give his neighbor drink, adding his venom to make him drunken, would sin (Habakkuk 2:15-16). Yet, both Peter and Paul wrote explicitly that Jesus was without sin (1 Peter 2:21-22; 2 Corinthians 5:21). With confidence one can know that Jesus did not turn the water into an intoxicating drink.

A second commonly heard argument used to support “social drinking” is from the qualifications of elders and deacons. The elder is to be “not given to wine (KJV)” or “no brawler (ASV)” (1 Timothy 3:3), while the deacon is to be “not given to much wine” (1 Timothy 3:8). Paul would be contradicting himself if he meant that the elder could imbibe in intoxicating beverages as long as he was not addicted. For the elder is also to be “vigilant (KJV)” or “temperate (ASV)” (1 Timothy 3:2). The Greek word from which this comes, *neefalion*, means “sober, temperate; abstaining from wine” (Thayer 425). Vincent adds that it means “to be sober” with reference to drink (1026). For the elder to be not given to wine “cannot, therefore, mean merely freedom from their excessive use. On the other hand, they probably carry their literal signification, ‘not near wine,’ and even forbid the presence of an elder at drinking parties (Jeffcoat 74). Paul, also, creates for himself a dilemma if he means that the deacon can have a little intoxicating beverage, but not too much. If that reasoning would be correct, does Paul then mean that a little desire of filthy lucre is acceptable, yet being greedy of it is not (1 Timothy 3:8)? Likewise, does Solomon mean to indicate that a little wickedness is acceptable when he wrote, “Be not overmuch wicked” (Ecclesiastes 7:17)? Though Paul is saying the deacon must not be one who gives himself over to much wine, he is not necessarily condoning the use of a little wine. “One of the qualifications of the deacon is that he cannot be given to drunkenness. While other passages condemn the use of alcoholic beverages, this one condemns the excessive use of the same” (Wacaster 470).

A third argument commonly used in support of social drinking is that Paul told Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach’s sake (1 Timothy 5:23). Actually, this confirms the idea that Timothy knew to abstain. Why else would Paul have needed to encourage him to use the wine (Patton 93)? Besides, this was an exhortation to use the wine for medicinal purposes. Such is not the case of social drinking or a little recreational use of marijuana. It would be more along the line of the legal use of a prescription given by a doctor. As indicated earlier, such use is not prohibited, for Jesus indicated the use of a doctor, which would include the means available to him, for good health (Luke 5:31). In addition, one cannot assume that the wine spoken of by Paul was an alcoholic, intoxicating wine. Various forms of unfermented “wine” were used for medicinal purposes (Patton 93-94). Therefore, this does not in any way approve of the use of a little beverage alcohol or illegal drug.

The question about social drinking, and therefore even small amounts of other drugs used recreationally, can be answered finally and completely from Paul's comments to the church at Ephesus. Paul wrote, "And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). The term, "drunken," is from the Greek, *methusko*. Vines defines this as "signifies to make drunk, or to grow drunk (an inceptive verb, marking the process or the state expressed in No. 1), to become intoxicated" (Vol. I, 341). Young gives, "to begin to be softened" (275). Another defines it, "to inebriate, make drunk" (Moulton 261). Paul, therefore, was exhorting the Ephesians not to even begin to become drunk. It is sin.

Medical science agrees with the concept that one begins to be drunk from the very beginning, the very first drink. Jeffcoat states,

"as previously indicated [pp. 85-91, TLM], the finer grades of judgment, concentration, and understanding are the first to be affected. Such effect, which may occur **after as little as one drink** [emphasis TLM]...Tests by delicate instruments have indicated that small doses of ethyl alcohol also affect the functions of sight, hearing, and touch sensation...This is the reason, that after an extensive study, it has been determined that the efficiency of operating an automobile is affected progressively from the first measurable quantity of alcohol in the blood" (91).

British scientists have found that even modest amounts of alcohol will make the opposite sex appear better-looking (Reuters Ltd). That explains the commercial this author has heard for a particular cut rate liquor establishment, "The more of our beer that she drinks, the better you look." As pointed out earlier, after a few drinks one feels extremely confident and euphoric. One will not realize the true effect the alcohol, or other drug, has had on oneself (Alls 48).

All of this shows quite well that from the first drink of alcohol, and likewise from the first use of drugs, one begins poisoning the body, begins the process of being intoxicated, and sins.

Conclusion

The evidence has been presented to show that the use of drugs, including alcohol, is harmful to the body and harmful to the soul. The Bible warns of the dangers of strong drink, and therefore, in principle, of drugs. It not only condemns drunkenness, but it condemns the very beginning of drunkenness, which comes with the very first drink.

Every Christian should heed the warning of Peter, "Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Could there be any fleshly lust which wars more against the soul than the lust for alcohol and/or drugs?

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