

Alcohol and the Christian

The Apostle Peter, in the first of his epistles, wrote with deep emotion to the young Christian church in his time:

1 Peter 2:11

Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul.

The "Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary of Synonyms" defines "beseech" as a strong form of begging implying "eager urgency and often anxiety and solicitude". Hence this is a very strong warning from a high ranking, miracle working, original Apostle about warfare wherein Christians can be killed by the passions of the flesh. This is very serious!

What could these passions be which are so deadly and warranted an impassioned begging from such an important Apostle? This same Apostle has written more details to the same group in the same epistle, answering this question:

1 Peter 4:1-5

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, {2} so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh NO LONGER BY HUMAN PASSIONS but by the will of God. {3} Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, DRUNKENNESS, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. {4} They are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you; {5} but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Notice that one of these deadly lusts of the flesh is DRUNKENNESS. Peter tells us that the "normal" people in these societies were "surprised" that these Christians gave up drunkenness, implying that heavy drinking was considered "normal" and desirable in those societies.

Was Peter a wowser? The "normal" non-Christian people would have thought so. Was this only his opinion, or is there something more serious here. Let us read the words of Paul to the Greeks at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, {10} nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor DRUNKARDS, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. {11} And such WERE some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Was Paul a wowser too? He agreed with Peter, and wrote that drunkards "will not inherit the kingdom of God". If they won't enter the kingdom of God, they will be in the Lake of Fire.

The prophet Isaiah was at it too. He writes that God goes so far as to place a curse on drunkards:

Isaiah 5:11

Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening till wine inflames them!

Is drunkenness really that much of a sin? What's wrong with a little merriment? Isn't this just a victimless sin?

Facts About Alcohol Abuse

Drug-Arm "Drug Resources No. 4", "Australian Trends", informs us that Alcohol is second only to tobacco as the major cause of drug related mortality in Australia with 6500 deaths in 1992.

The Centre for Education and Information on Drugs and Alcohol (CEIDA) brochure 9, "Alcohol", states that, of teenagers who drink either regularly or occasionally, 25% of males and 30% of females are drinking at harmful levels. The 6500 deaths in 1992 represent about 26% of total drug-related deaths or 5% of deaths from all causes. What a sad and pitiful waste of life! Caused by one of the "passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul". There were 6500 Australians from 1992 who could be alive today if only they had heeded Peter's warning.

Orion magazine (on the Internet at <http://irion.csuchico.edu/Archives/Volume34/Issue2/Dimensions/Thdaofalab.html>) claims one in four American families is affected by alcohol, 18 million individual Americans are affected, and 10 million are alcoholics. What a catastrophe! Furthermore, alcohol is involved in 53% of all highway deaths, 50% of spouse abuse cases, 38% of child abuse cases, 65% of drownings, 54% of violent crimes, and 49% of murders or attempts.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism is funded by the government of the United States because of the seriousness of alcohol related problems. In their booklet, "Alcoholism", available on the Internet at <http://www.NIAAA.NIH.GOV/publications/booklet.htm> they provide many alarming research facts and statistics, including the following (the numbers in brackets identify the reference sources in the original booklet):

For most people, alcohol is a pleasant accompaniment to social activities. Moderate alcohol use -- up to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women and older people (A standard drink is one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits) -- is not harmful for most adults. Nonetheless, a substantial number of people have serious trouble with their drinking. Currently, 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. In addition, approximately 53 percent of men and women in the United States report that one or more of their close relatives have a drinking problem.

The consequences of alcohol misuses are serious -- in many cases, life-threatening. Heavy drinking can increase the risk of certain cancers, especially those of the liver, esophagus, throat, and larynx (voice box). It can also cause liver cirrhosis, immune system problems, brain damage, and harm to the fetus during pregnancy. In

addition, drinking increases the risk of death from automobile crashes, recreational accidents, and on-the-job accidents and also increase the likelihood of homicide and suicide. In purely economic terms, alcohol-use problems cost society approximately \$100 billion per year. In human terms, the costs are incalculable.

And this is just in the United States! What a tragedy for humanity!

Apologists for alcohol consumption (frequently also apologists for the ``socially acceptable'' values Satan has inflicted onto humanity) should note the NIAAA's definition of ``moderate alcohol use'' in the former paragraph above. Lest any reader should misunderstand, the author is not against alcohol drinking. Jesus and the Apostles drank wine. Paul recommended to Timothy, for his stomach's sake, to switch to wine from water (which was probably contaminated). Today Paul would probably recommend using boiled water in place of an unchlorinated, untreated water supply.

The NIAAA has a series of scientific publications on the dangers of alcohol abuse. We treat just two of them here.

Here are some extracts from NIAAA Alcohol Alert Number 15, "Alcohol and AIDS" (the numbers in brackets identify the reference sources in the original booklet):

Alcohol and the Immune System

Alcohol can impair normal immune responses that protect the body from disease (6,7,8). Chronic alcohol consumption has been shown to reduce the number of infection-fighting white blood cells in laboratory animals (9,10,11) and in humans (12,13). Chronic alcohol ingestion or alcohol dependence can depress antibody production and other immune responses in animals (10,9) and in humans (14,15). Alcohol can suppress activities of certain immune system cells, called macrophages, that help keep the lungs free from infection (16,17). In addition, alcoholics appear to be more susceptible to bacterial infections and cancer than are nonalcoholics (18,19). Studies in animals and in humans indicate that consuming alcohol during pregnancy can decrease immune resistance in the offspring (20,21,22).

Alcohol's generally immunosuppressive effects could mean that 1) drinking may increase vulnerability to HIV infection among people exposed to the virus, and that 2) among people who are already HIV infected, alcohol-induced immunosuppression might add to HIV-induced immunosuppression, and speed the onset or exacerbate the pathology of AIDS-related illness. These are complex ideas and areas of intense investigation, but so far only a few studies have been published. Researchers have learned that alcohol can impair white blood cell responses to HIV (23). A provocative study that warrants replication found that a single drinking episode depressed certain immune responses of white blood cells taken from healthy volunteers (24). In addition, white blood cells isolated after this drinking episode were more susceptible to HIV infection than were cells isolated from subjects who did not drink, hinting that even occasional alcohol consumption may increase the likelihood of infection upon exposure to HIV. Whether alcohol use influences the progression of AIDS in persons already infected with HIV has been

explored in a recent study of homosexual men (25). While these researchers found that neither alcohol nor other drugs seem to influence the progression of HIV infection or the development of AIDS, their results await confirmation. Clearly, more research is needed to understand alcohol's role in HIV infection and the course of ensuing disease.

Alcohol and Sexual Behavior

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Alcohol's relationship to high-risk sexual behavior may be explained in two ways. First, alcohol use may be a marker for a risk-taking temperament: those who drink alcohol may also engage in a variety of high-risk activities, including unsafe sexual practices, as a part of a "problem behavior syndrome" (26,27). Second, alcohol may influence high-risk behaviors at specific sexual encounters by affecting judgment and disinhibiting socially learned restraints (28,29). These are not mutually exclusive interpretations.

In the NIAAA Alcohol Alert Number 22, "Alcohol and Nutrition", they point out

Impairment of Nutrient Digestion and Utilization

Once ingested, food must be digested (broken down into small components) so it is available for energy and maintenance of body structure and function. Digestion begins in the mouth and continues in the stomach and intestines, with help from the pancreas. The nutrients from digested food are absorbed from the intestines into the blood and carried to the liver. The liver prepares nutrients either for immediate use or for storage and future use.

Alcohol inhibits the breakdown of nutrients into usable molecules by decreasing secretion of digestive enzymes from the pancreas (2). Alcohol impairs nutrient absorption by damaging the cells lining the stomach and intestines and disabling transport of some nutrients into the blood (3). In addition, nutritional deficiencies themselves may lead to further absorption problems. For example, folate deficiency alters the cells lining the small intestine, which in turn impairs absorption of water and nutrients including glucose, sodium, and additional folate (3).

Even if nutrients are digested and absorbed, alcohol can prevent them from being fully utilized by altering their transport, storage, and excretion (4). Decreased liver stores of vitamins such as vitamin A (5), and increased excretion of nutrients such as fat, indicate impaired utilization of nutrients by alcoholics (3).

Alcohol and Energy Supply

The three basic nutritional components found in food--carbohydrates, proteins, and fats--are used as energy after being converted to simpler products. Some alcoholics ingest as much as 50 percent of their total daily calories from alcohol, often neglecting important

foods (3,6).

Even when food intake is adequate, alcohol can impair the mechanisms by which the body controls blood glucose levels, resulting in either increased or decreased blood glucose (glucose is the body's principal sugar) (7). In nondiabetic alcoholics, increased blood sugar, or hyperglycemia--caused by impaired insulin secretion--is usually temporary and without consequence. Decreased blood sugar, or hypoglycemia, can cause serious injury even if this condition is short lived. Hypoglycemia can occur when a fasting or malnourished person consumes alcohol. When there is no food to supply energy, stored sugar is depleted, and the products of alcohol metabolism inhibit the formation of glucose from other compounds such as amino acids (7). As a result, alcohol causes the brain and other body tissue to be deprived of glucose needed for energy and function.

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Alcohol and the Maintenance of Cell Structure and Function

Structure

Because cells are made mostly of protein, an adequate protein diet is important for maintaining cell structure, especially if cells are being damaged. Research indicates that alcohol affects protein nutrition by causing impaired digestion of proteins to amino acids, impaired processing of amino acids by the small intestine and liver, impaired synthesis of proteins from amino acids, and impaired protein secretion by the liver (3).

Function

Nutrients are essential for proper body function; proteins, vitamins, and minerals provide the tools that the body needs to perform properly. Alcohol can disrupt body function by causing nutrient deficiencies and by usurping the machinery needed to metabolize nutrients.

Vitamins.

Vitamins are essential to maintaining growth and normal metabolism because they regulate many physiological processes. Chronic heavy drinking is associated with deficiencies in many vitamins because of decreased food ingestion and, in some cases, impaired absorption, metabolism, and utilization (1,12). For example, alcohol inhibits fat absorption and thereby impairs absorption of the vitamins A, E, and D that are normally absorbed along with dietary fats (12,13). Vitamin A deficiency can be associated with night blindness, and vitamin D deficiency is associated with softening of the bones (6).

Vitamins A, C, D, E, K, and the B vitamins, also deficient in some alcoholics, are all involved in wound healing and cell maintenance (14). In particular, because vitamin K is necessary for blood clotting, deficiencies of that vitamin can cause delayed clotting and result in excess bleeding. Deficiencies of other vitamins involved in brain function can cause severe neurological damage.

Minerals.

Deficiencies of minerals such as calcium, magnesium, iron, and zinc are common in alcoholics, although alcohol itself does not seem to affect the absorption of these minerals (15). Rather, deficiencies

seem to occur secondary to other alcohol-related problems: decreased calcium absorption due to fat malabsorption; magnesium deficiency due to decreased intake, increased urinary excretion, vomiting, and diarrhea (16); iron deficiency related to gastrointestinal bleeding (3,15); and zinc malabsorption or losses related to other nutrient deficiencies (17). Mineral deficiencies can cause a variety of medical consequences from calcium-related bone disease to zinc-related night blindness and skin lesions.

Alcohol, Malnutrition, and Medical Complications

Liver Disease

Although alcoholic liver damage is caused primarily by alcohol itself, poor nutrition may increase the risk of alcohol-related liver damage. For example, nutrients normally found in the liver, such as carotenoids, which are the major sources of vitamin A, and vitamin E compounds, are known to be affected by alcohol consumption (18,19). Decreases in such nutrients may play some role in alcohol-related liver damage.

Pancreatitis

Research suggests that malnutrition may increase the risk of developing alcoholic pancreatitis (20,21), but some research performed outside the United States links pancreatitis more closely with overeating (21). Preliminary research suggests that alcohol's damaging effect on the pancreas may be exacerbated by a protein-deficient diet (22).

Brain

Nutritional deficiencies can have severe and permanent effects on brain function. Specifically, thiamine deficiencies, often seen in alcoholics, can cause severe neurological problems such as impaired movement and memory loss seen in Wernicke/Korsakoff syndrome (23).

Pregnancy

Alcohol has direct toxic effects on fetal development, causing alcohol-related birth defects, including fetal alcohol syndrome. Alcohol itself is toxic to the fetus, but accompanying nutritional deficiency can affect fetal development, perhaps compounding the risk of developmental damage (24,25).

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We could go on and on relating the problems associated with alcohol abuse but the reader should now have sufficient evidence to understand Peter's warning against the "passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul".

Why the Difference in Outlook on Alcohol

Recall the words of Peter:

1 Peter 4:4

4 They are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you;

Why? Because you have become weird, different from society, with a set of values different from those accepted by "normal" people. Why is there this difference? Why do our societies have a value on alcohol drinking which is different from those of the New Testament Christianity? Again, the answer is in the Bible. Peter gave us a clue in his phrase "that wage war against your soul". There is a war going on, and there are many casualties, but few people are aware of it. The enemy is most effective when the victims don't even know there is a war being waged against them, and the enemy will try to keep us asleep and in darkness with blindfolds. Satan, the deceiver of the whole world (Rev 12:9), has the world in darkness, as the resurrected Jesus, shining brighter than the sun with light that no man can behold, told Saul on the road to Damascus:

Acts 26:16-18

16 But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, {17} delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles -- to whom I send you {18} TO OPEN THEIR EYES, that they may turn FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT and FROM THE POWER OF SATAN TO GOD, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Paul passed this information on to the Greeks at Corinth:

2 Corinthians 4:4

In their case the GOD OF THIS WORLD HAS BLINDED THE MINDS of the unbelievers, TO KEEP THEM FROM SEEING THE LIGHT of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.

Paul passed this information on to the Greeks as Ephesus:

Ephesians 6:12

For we are NOT CONTENDING AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the SPIRITUAL HOSTS OF WICKEDNESS IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES.

Jesus explained how Satan has control of the societies of this world and uses social values and norms to its own advantage and to the harm of humans.

Matthew 13:19

When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path.

Matthew 13:38-39

the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil one, {39} and the ENEMY WHO SOWED THEM IS THE DEVIL; the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels.

Jesus provided this insight into "normal" humans and how they are manipulated by Satan, the great deceiver and liar, the master propagandist:

John 8:44

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is A LIAR AND THE FATHER OF LIES.

We can gather these facts:

1. Satan rules the societies of this world
2. Satan hates people
3. Satan uses lies, being the master liar and the father of lies and draw the conclusion that Satan governs the world through lies and false concepts to the harm of all people.

In the same theme of warnings in Peter's first epistle, he writes this about Satan:

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like A ROARING LION, SEEKING SOME ONE TO DEVOUR.

We must recognize that Satan also knows that the "passions of the flesh" "wage war against your soul" from millenia of observation of humanity, if for no other reason. Satan will also know what are the "passions of the flesh".

Putting these items of information together, we can expect that Satan will exalt the "passions of the flesh" and manipulate social values to harm people and cut them off from God to the greatest extent it can. Hence we would expect that Satan would have influenced our societies to consider heavy drinking a desirable value, and that is what we see. In spite of logic and statistics, we have teenagers and adults engaged in activities that are destroying families, devastating individuals, and wasting resources and lives. In our societies true Biblical values are overthrown. God curses those who call evil good and vice versa, putting darkness (the values taught by Satan) in place of light, putting the Satan's ways that bring bitterness in place of God's ways that bring happiness and peace.

Isaiah 5:20

Woe to those who CALL EVIL GOOD AND GOOD EVIL, who put DARKNESS FOR LIGHT AND LIGHT FOR DARKNESS, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

The Word of God In This Matter

Yet we live in a society which claims to be Christian, while rejecting the plain warnings in the Word of God about alcohol abuse.

Proverbs 20:1

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

Proverbs 23:20

Be not among winebibbers, or among gluttonous eaters of meat;

Proverbs 23:29-31

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? {30} Those who tarry long over wine, those who go to try mixed wine. {31} Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly.

Ecclesiastes 10:17

Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of free men, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

Luke 21:34

"But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare;

Ephesians 5:18

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,

Romans 13:13

let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.

Finally, let us return to Paul and another account of the words of Jesus on the road to Damascus:

Acts 26:18

to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

If This Has Been You

If you exist in the chains of alcohol, there is help available to you from the greatest power in the universe, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who loves you dearly and died for your salvation -- salvation not only from eternal death but also for your salvation from whatever enslaves you in this life. You need to see yourself for what you are, a weak human, and call on God and his Son for the help you need.

Isaiah 66:1-2

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? {2} All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the LORD. But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is HUMBLE AND CONTRITE IN SPIRIT, AND TREMBLES AT MY WORD.

Isaiah 57:15

For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also WITH HIM WHO IS OF A CONTRITE AND HUMBLE SPIRIT, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

2 Chronicles 16:9

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth,
to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward
him.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of
God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor
adulterers, nor sexual perverts, {10} nor thieves, nor the greedy,
nor DRUNKARDS, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of
God. {11} And such WERE some of you. But YOU WERE WASHED, YOU WERE
SANCTIFIED, YOU WERE JUSTIFIED in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
and in the Spirit of our God.

Moulding Christ's words to Paul to your situation, the power of the Holy
Spirit from God is available "to open YOUR eyes, that YOU may turn from
darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that YOU may
receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified
by faith in me."

Conclusions

With modern water reticulation methods and the marketing of alternative
drinks (including tea and coffee), those in western societies no
longer need to consume wine daily, as was the case in ancient societies.
An occasional alcoholic drink in modern societies can be beneficial and
enjoyable. However, it is no deprivation to miss a drink. Nobody ever
died from skipping a glass of alcoholic beverage, but, over the
millenia, millions have died from over-drinking it.

To be in the kingdom of God, Christians must turn from darkness to
light. Part of that turning involves a recognition of the sin of alcohol
abuse and a joining in thought with Peter, Paul, Isaiah, Jesus and God
against drunkenness.

Alcohol may be a good servant but, like Satan the father of lies, can
become a cruel master if given the opportunity. Those who are free from
this curse ought to strive to help those who are enslaved by it.

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March 1997

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Latest Update: 2 April 1997

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