

## VIDEO ON ALCOHOLISM

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(Second part)

### IN THIS SECOND PART, WE WILL TALK ABOUT THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

#### A. Different Terms for Wine in the Bible

The word alcohol is not found in the Bible. It is the word wine that appears more than 200 times in well-known versions of the Bible in English. These are translations of terms used in Hebrew for the Old Testament and in Greek for the New Testament.

In the Bible, *yayin* is the usual word for the fermented juice of the vine and is usually rendered “wine” in the Bible. It is used 141 times in the Old Testament. Its Greek equivalent in New Testament is *oinos*. In addition to *yayin* other words like *shekar*, *hemer*, and *sikera* refer to intoxicating drinks. On the other hand, words such as *tirosh*, *asis*, *oxos* and *gleukos* refer to non-intoxicating drinks.

In this teaching, we have chosen to treat intoxicating drinks, wine or alcohol of which *yayin* and *oinos* are the most used. There is no confusion about fresh grape juice or soft drinks.

In the Bible, there is a positive as well as negative understanding of alcohol consumption.

#### B. Positive understanding of alcohol use

There were at least four positive and responsible ways to use wine in the Old Testament.

a) *Wine as a Tithing*: In Genesis 14:18 Melchizedek, king of Salem, and priest of the Most High God, brought Abram bread and wine. He blessed Abram and God, and Abram gave him the tenth part of everything.

b) *Wine as refreshment*: In 2 Samuel 16: 1-2, Ziba brought wine to King David to refresh those who were exhausted in the wilderness.

c) *Wine to improve a sad mood*: In Psalm 104: 14-15, the psalmist praises God for blessings including “wine that delights the heart of man, and makes more than oil shine his face, and bread that sustains the heart of man.”

d) *Wine to facilitate digestion*: In Isaiah 25: 6, God will soon prepare a feast for his people, a feast that includes wine, probably that wine actually helps digest large amounts of food, “The Lord of the armies prepares a feast of succulent food, a feast of old wines, of delicious food, full of marrow, of old, clarified wines, on this mountain.”

e) *Other positive references to the use of wine*: In Genesis 27: 25-37 Jacob brought food and bread to his father Isaac, and he ate of it, and brought him wine, and drank, and Isaac blessed Jacob his son. When David was a young man, his father Jesse sent him with

bread and wine to King Saul (1 Samuel 16:20); When Israel crowned David king in Hebron, they drank wine in abundance (1 Chronicles 12: 39-40). Nehemiah, as governor of Israel, had wine in abundance at his table (Nehemiah 5:18); Esther served wine to the king, her husband (Esther 5: 6); the children of Job drank wine (Job 1:13, 18). In Proverbs 9: 5 the invitation of Wisdom at her banquet includes eating bread and drinking wine she had mixed. In Proverbs 31: 6-7, wine was given to those who are in anguish so that they forget their poverty and they do not remember their misery. Ecclesiastes 9: 7 says, "Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine cheerfully; for God has long enjoyed what you do." In anticipation of the gospel of the kingdom of God, Isaiah invites all who are thirsty, to come to the waters, and all who have no money to buy wine and milk without money and without price (Isaiah 55: 1). Moreover, among the promises of the restoration of Israel, Amos 9:14 says that the children of Israel will plant vineyards and drink wine.

In the New Testament there are at least two positive ways of using wine:

*a) The medical use of wine:* This includes its beneficial effect on wounds. In Luke 10:34, the Good Samaritan went to the half-dead man, "bound his wounds, having poured oil and wine there" (Luke 10:34). Paul, the apostle recommends that Timothy should stop drinking only water, but should use a little wine because of his stomach and his frequent illnesses (1 Timothy 5:23).

*b) Domestic use of wine:* Wine was offered to the guests. At a wedding in Cana where wine was lacking, Jesus responded positively to Mary's request and changed the water into wine to satisfy the need for so many guests to the event (John 2: 3, 9).

In summary, we have seen that both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, fermented wine, that is, containing a dose of alcohol, has been used by men and women of God no doubt in the good sense as they were drinking it with joy in their houses and especially during their festivals, as they offered it to their visitors and even as an offering to the Lord. The abundance of wine was seen as a sign of blessing of the Lord and its lack as a sign of calamity.

Besides its use for food, we also saw that fermented wine was used for medical purposes, to bring happiness to those who have bitterness in their heart, for its beneficial effect on wounds, fatigue, and diseases.

### **C. Negative understanding of alcohol consumption**

However, in the Bible there are many negative references to wine, especially the verses that condemn the use of it to the point of drunkenness. Drinking wine excessively leads to negative acts such as sexual immorality and incest, poverty, conflict, misfortune and sadness, error, contempt for God's works, lust and debauchery.

In Genesis 9: 21-24 Noah drank wine and got drunk, and lay naked in his tent. This clearly shows that intoxication leads to problems.

In Genesis 19: 30-38, the two daughters of Lot, seeing that there were no men in the land to come to them according to the customs of all the countries, decided to make their father drink wine to have sexual relations with him and to keep his race.

In Leviticus 10: 8-10 a directive is given to Aaron and his descendants (the Levites) not to consume any wine or strong liquor before their ministry in the tabernacle, so that they do not die, which is a perpetual law among their descendants. We can infer from this prohibition that in some cases some people are never allowed to drink intoxicating drinks.

In Numbers 6: 3-20, the Nazarenes during the time of their consecration must separate from wine and strong liquors, drink neither wine vinegar nor other vinegar, nor drink grape juice nor eat all kinds of fresh or dried grapes. Then the priest shall raise them up as a high offering before the Lord. After that, the Nazarenes can drink wine. In Judges 13: 4, 7, wine and strong drinks are forbidden to Samson and his mother as part of the Nazarite vowing process.

Several verses of Proverbs refer to wine and strong liquors and describe their consequences. Proverbs 20: 1 says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." Proverbs 21:17 says, "He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich." Proverbs 23: 20-21 says, "Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags." Proverbs 23: 29-32 further describes the sad condition of those who indulge in the excesses of wine, "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper." In Proverbs 31: 4-5, kings and rulers are warned against the use of wine and strong drink, so that their faculty is not blunted in the execution of their duties, "It is not for kings, O Lemuel-- not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights."

Isaiah speaks several times of those who have been surmounted by wine and strong liquors, and thus condemns the abuse of wine. Isaiah 5: 11-12 says, "Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands." Isaiah 5:22 says, "Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks."

Jeremiah is indignant at the intoxication of wine when he says, "Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones tremble. I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the LORD and his holy words." (Jeremiah 23: 9).

Ezekiel forbade wine to the priests during the exercise of their office in the house of God, "No priest is to drink wine when he enters the inner court." (Ezekiel 44:21). Hosea says that wine makes one lose understanding (Hosea 4:11).

In the New Testament wine and strong drinks are forbidden to John the Baptist in relation to his subjection to a vow of Nazarene "...for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth." (Luke 1:15).

In Romans 14:21, Paul the apostle recommends not to eat meat or drink wine in front of those who may be offended, "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."

In Ephesians 5:18 Paul clearly warned against drunkenness, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

In his pastoral epistles, Paul warns deacons, bishops, and elderly women from drunkenness. In 1 Timothy 3: 8 he says, "Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain." In Titus 1: 7 he says, "Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless-- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain." And Titus said, "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good." (Titus 2: 3).

In summary, negative references about wine in the Bible clearly condemn the abuse of wine or alcohol, which is drunkenness. It is sin of intemperance and gluttony in consumption. They show that intoxication leads to many troubles like poverty, confusion, stumbling, debauchery, madness, and shame. For this reason wine and intoxicating drinks are forbidden to specific groups such as Levites, Nazarenes, kings and chiefs, priests, bishops, deacons, and elderly women either because of their vows or because of their functions.

#### **D. Biblical Principles on the Use of Alcohol**

In addition to the strong statements of the Bible against alcohol abuse, here are four biblical principles that should guide the Christian's behavior toward alcohol.

*a) The principle of the lordship of Christ:* Paul writes, "You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:20). Christians are free, but not free to do what they want. Freedom in Christ requires Christians to have a high standard of conduct and place them before their responsibility to live to please their Lord. They belong to Christ, for he gave his life as a ransom for them. Given what Christ did for the believers, they should make every effort to honor his lordship in their lives. In this perspective, does a Christian honor the lordship of Christ when he engages in the consumption of alcohol, which can hinder others in their faith? It is evident that a Christian honors the lordship of Christ when he lives a sober life that edifies others.

*b) The principle of edifying others:* Paul's counsel to Christians is to pursue those things that edify and strengthen others, "Let all things be done for edification" (1

Corinthians 14:26, cf. 10:23). Christians are servants, and they should consider how their behavior can best serve others. From this point of view, Paul advises the strong Christian to refrain from any behavior (including eating and drinking) that influences others to engage in activities that may harm their spiritual life.

*c) The principle of proper treatment of the body:* Paul teaches that the body is sacred because God created it, and the Holy Spirit dwells in the body of every Christian (1 Corinthians 6: 19-20). Whatever we do with our bodies affects the residence of the Holy Spirit. Excessive consumption of alcohol and intoxicating drinks destroys the body and does not facilitate a life that glorifies God. Out of respect for God, Christians should do their utmost to engage in activities that honor and strengthen their bodies. The whole person of every Christian must be subject to the Holy Spirit who dwells within him and must be under his control and not that of alcohol (Ephesians 5:18).

*d) The principle of doing everything for the glory of God:* this fundamental principle appears in 1 Corinthians 10:31 where Paul deals with different attitudes toward eating, drinking and sex, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” Whatever activity a Christian undertakes, whatever decisions he takes, everything must be for the glory of God, and not for his selfish satisfaction. Whatever cannot be done for the honor of God should not be done at all. So the question for the Christian who drinks is this, who glorifies God, whoever drinks alcohol or whoever abstains?

Given these four principles, it is evident that God is better glorified by Christians who refrain from taking alcohol out of consideration for others. There is no glory for God in the pursuit of pleasure which has a negative influence on faith of others and which is an obstacle to the progress of the Gospel. Living for the glory of God must be the guiding principle of our lives.