

The Church's Position on Alcohol consumption

The Wilmington Church of Christ considers the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and therefore our single guide in all matters of doctrine, including matters that pertain to what we eat and drink.

The consumption of alcohol is a matter of Christian conscience and as such is a matter of liberty, love and self-control.

First, let it be said plainly that drunkenness is never acceptable by God. Being drunk is a sin and therefore is NOT to be a part of the Christian life. (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:23; 1 Cor. 6:10; Prov. 23:20-21)

But the consumption of modest amounts of alcohol is a matter of Christian liberty. Were it not so, why would Jesus have made literally barrels of wine during His initial miracle? (John 2:1-11) Likewise, if all consumption of alcohol is sin, then Paul's admonition to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23 would have been a Holy Spirit inspired leading of the younger man to sin! So the perspective that all consumption of alcohol is sinful is not correct either.

In Matthew 15:11 Jesus states, "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." In other words, the things that we eat and drink do not defile us. It is the words, actions and intentions of a person that are to be judged as evil or sinful.

So from a Scriptural perspective some alcohol can be consumed, but not to the point of drunkenness.

If only the consumption of alcohol were that simple an issue. Unfortunately, there are other factors involved in the consumption of alcohol that need to be considered as well.

1. At what point does alcohol impair the judgment of an individual?

Some studies show that even inhaling a strong drink can affect brain activity. Many today argue persuasively that even a single drink is dangerous. Even small amounts of strong alcohol can have effects upon decision making and lower resistance to other sinful influences. Weighing these things on the scale, it is important to at least minimize any intake of alcohol.

2. Alcohol consumption can become habit forming.

In 1 Corinthians twice Paul tells the reader that "All things are permissible...." (1 Cor. 6:12 and 10:23). This is particularly a powerful argument because it was made in direct response to things being consumed by the Corinthian Christians. Had Paul left this statement at this point, the consumption of alcohol would clearly be something explicitly acceptable to Christians. But in both places Paul follows up with statements about not allowing what is permissible to take over or control you. In other words, abstain from things that are addictive. There is no denying that alcohol addiction is a major concern in our society today and it is also true that the best way to never become addicted to something is to never start it to begin with.

3. The negative impact of public consumption of alcohol in today's society.

Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 8:9) "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak." While not written directly about the consumption of alcohol, Paul makes this argument about consuming something that many in his day saw as wicked. Today, we live in society where alcohol consumption is not often associated with Godly living. He tells his readers that while there is nothing inherently wrong with the consumption of the substance, the impact of our partaking of it upon the conscience of those that witness it can be damaging. It can ruin your righteous standing before others while giving tacit permission to those who are not mature enough to stop before becoming drunk or even addicted. Paul warns this must be a consideration of a mature Christian before and when they consume (alcohol) meat offered to idols.

There are many other facets to this argument from personal experiences and testimony to heart-wrenching stories of lives tragically altered and lost because of alcohol that could be explored. But the facts are, Scripturally speaking, the consumption of alcohol is not a sin.

So the position of the Church is that while drinking small amounts of alcohol by a Christian is permitted a Christian should carefully weigh the choice before exercising this liberty. Will it damage their witness? Will it cause another to sin and drink to the point of being drunk? Could it cause them to possibly begin a habit that leads to an addiction?

While the church will not go beyond the Biblical admonition to not be drunk, we would discourage our members from participating in a practice that has so many negative entanglements. Out of love for others and a desire to abstain from the appearance of evil we would strongly encourage the members of our body to avoid the consumption of alcoholic drinks.