

Wednesday, October 14, 2015 - At the Bottom of Your Glass

(Much of this article taken from Windell Gann's sermon at the 1999 Freed Hardeman Lectures)

This week has claimed another victim in the "game" most Americans play with alcohol. The problems Steve Sarkisian has experienced with alcohol leaves a trail long and public. It can be traced back to the first time he said, "Just one drink doesn't matter..." Unfortunately, there are too many in the Lord's church who think their wisdom usurps God's regarding the subject of drinking and that they know what is and is not "allowed" and "how much" is "acceptable." Foolishness!

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise" (Prov. 20:1).

In the text of Proverbs 20:1, the terms "wine" and "strong drink" are metonymies for those who drink them. The idea is that "wine" mocks the one who drinks it promising wonderful pleasure but yielding far less by dulling the senses through intoxication. "Strong drink" produces a "brawler" who is loud, boisterous, aggressive and pugilistic. Use of intoxicants confuses the senses and causes loss of control.

What is so disturbing today is that some who claim to be religious, and even some members of the Lord's church are calling social drinking good instead of evil (Isa. 5:20-23). Some even blaspheme the wonderful name and character of Jesus Christ by referring to his visit to the marriage feast in Cana, as proof that our Lord endorsed the moderate use of alcoholic beverages (Jn. 2:1-11). Those who affirm that Jesus endorsed social drinking assume the point which is their burden to prove, namely, that the water which Jesus turned into wine was intoxicating wine. This they will never be able to do and is inconsistent with His other teachings on the subject.

When Solomon said, "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long over wine, Those who go to taste mixed wine" (Prov. 23:29, 30) he did not have in mind fresh

grape juice, but rather intoxicating wine. Therefore in reference to intoxicating wine, Solomon said, "Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly; At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper" (Prov. 23:31, 32).

Solomon simply meant by this last statement that one should not drink wine when it is fermented and intoxicating for it will destroy like the bite of a serpent and like the sting of an adder.

A simple but very revealing passage about the attitude and disposition of first century Christians toward intoxicating drinks is 1 Peter 4:3-4. The point of the passage is that in times past the Christians lived as the Gentiles and "pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries," but now that they are in Christ they live such a different life that former friends "are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you." The contrast is clear, while in the past before conversion we may have lived a life that took in "drinking parties," but now as Christians we no longer live that way.

Alcohol is a habit-forming drug, one that will lead to addiction. Unlike narcotics, however, alcohol in moderate amounts is socially acceptable in our culture and herein lies some of its danger. Alcohol must be defined as a drug for it causes the body to function in an abnormal manner. It acts directly on the central nervous system. The drug in our intoxicating

beverages is technically known as “ethyl alcohol” and is the ingredient that separates these beverages from such drinks as Coke, tea, fruit juices, etc. So we are dealing, not with some glamorous, innocent love potion, but with a drug, and a habit-forming one at that.

Most Bible students are aware that the New Testament condemns “drunkenness,” but some feel that one may moderately drink without being drunk. However, it can be argued that “evidence indicates that there is no guarantee of a ‘safe’ level of drinking, no absolute threshold below which alcohol fails to damage or destroy groups of cells in the brain and other vital organs.” In a pamphlet distributed by the American Automobile Association, it is contended: “The effects of alcohol begin with the first drink . . . The first effects are impairment of judgment and reason and weakening of self-control and normal inhibitions.”

Many alcoholics in the world started as social drinkers just an occasional beer in the privacy of one’s home, or at a tavern, a nightcap, an occasional cocktail, or “one for the road.” Believe me or not regarding the use and effects of alcohol. However, the judge of all has already spoken on this subjects multiple times. While the writer of Proverbs concludes our text saying, “And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise” the New Testament is very direct in saying “drunkards . . . shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:10).

That is the end of the matter.