

Alcohol and Recreational Drugs

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This paper provides guidelines for the use of alcohol and recreational drugs. First, it examines the biblical teaching regarding alcohol, then draws out application for contemporary practice. Finally, it addresses the related issue of recreational drug use.

I

Biblical Teaching

The Bible does not forbid all use of alcohol. On the contrary, the psalmist praises God for various forms of his provision, including wine (Psa 104:14-15). Jesus famously changed water into wine for a special occasion (John 2:1-11). The Apostle Paul urged his protégé Timothy to drink wine for medicinal purposes (1 Tim 5:23; cp. Prov 31:6). So, in certain contexts, alcohol can be permissible, even beneficial.

Yet the Bible clearly states it is a sin to become drunk, that is, under the control of alcohol: ‘*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*’ (Eph 5:18; cp. Prov 20:1; 23:20-21, 29-31; Luke 21:34; Rom 13:13). Unrepentant drunkenness indicates a person is not a Christian (Gal 5:21). A person who claims to be a Christian, yet is known to be a drunkard, should be excluded from the fellowship of the church until he or she repents (1 Cor 5:11; cp. 2 Cor 2:6-10).

So alcohol is not a black-and-white issue. Christians need to make wise choices with biblically informed discretion. Those who feel free to partake should not judge those whose conscience will not allow them to do so, and vice versa (Rom 14:1 – 15:7). While the Bible allows freedom in certain areas, such freedoms must be handled with great care lest they cause others to stumble and the user to be disqualified from ministry (1 Cor 6:12; 8:1-13).

II

Practical Application

In order to care for every believer within our congregation, and assist them in the matter of appropriate choices in alcohol use, we offer not rules and regulations, but rather guidelines and warnings. We trust the congregant to be Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided in their individual choices, knowing the impact alcohol use may have on his fellow believers. Often, that choice involves the voluntary setting aside of the freedom to use alcohol.

The consequences of drinking alcohol can be severe compared to any positive benefit derived from its use. Any individual should prayerfully consider their rationale to do so, searching the Scriptures for wisdom and guidance.

If someone has had past problems of alcohol abuse or has a family history of alcoholism, it is recommended that they totally abstain from the use of alcohol.

Church leaders should be exemplary in applying biblical discretion concerning the use of alcohol (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7; Heb 13:7; cp. Prov 31:4). This may include the voluntary surrender of the freedom to consume alcohol—for the sake of the self-disciplined as well as the brother or sister who may stumble, thus damaging their witness, health, family, or faith (Mark 9:42).

No Youth Sponsor, Youth Leader, or Children's Ministry Leader or Worker should have alcohol with them, have it available, or consume it in front of those they lead. They are to be examples to the youth, and the youth are to emulate their faith. Likewise, they should support the parent's convictions regarding abstinence or moderation as it applies to their own children.

VCB's building use policy forbids alcohol on church property. It is further recommended that believers use discretion in hosting gatherings in other settings where alcohol is available, so as not to cause their brothers and sisters in the Lord to be tempted to abuse it or to feel pressure to conform contrary to their convictions.

III *Recreational Drug Use*

With recent legalization of marijuana in many states, the use of recreational drugs has potential problems similar to alcohol abuse. The same warnings would apply. Followers of Christ should not use such drugs to alter their mood or to control their lives. It is God's will that believers live under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).