

**No 4 Wise about alcohol? Chapter 20:1, 23:29 to 35**

Proverbs isn’t a book you can treat chapter by chapter. Its wisdom is scattered through many chapters and the author slips from one topic to another then picks it up again later. Hence the verses on the topic of alcohol – the ones quoted above are still only a selection. So, we have to look at as many as we can and establish the principles that the author is trying to communicate.

Christian opinion about the consumption of alcohol covers a broad spectrum. There are those whose day-to-day life would include a glass of wine/beer. There are those who believe that believers should never consume alcohol. There are those who say that Jesus turned water into wine so it must be OK. Some Christian’s attitude to alcohol is influenced by a bad experience in their own family. It is also true that attitudes have changed over time. Some older people would not go to a pub on a Sunday.

1. Talk about the different attitudes you have experienced on the issue of drinking alcohol?

Was there a strong condemnation in your childhood?

Have you witnessed the damage drunkenness can do to relationships?

Do you enjoy a glass of wine or beer?

The emphasis of our two passages appears to be on excessive drinking. It is impossible to find a text which says ‘alcohol is evil’. In biblical times wine was the most common liquid consumed. Everyday wine was comparatively low in alcohol percentage but drinking water was not an option for fear of infection.

In 20:1 wine is personified as a ‘mocker’ – the last five proverbs of chapter 19 describe the trouble caused by a human mocker. This illustrates the fact what excessive wine creates a person who will not learn (19:25 to 27) – it creates a person in whom God is displeased.

1. Excess wine (and beer) turns us into people who cannot learn – we stop listening to instruction and, therefore, we do not grow wise. The ‘brawler’ in verse 1 is loud and noisy.

We err in what we get up to and our judgement is impaired?

It may not be alcohol but what noises make us into people who stop listening to God’s wisdom and decide to go our own way?

There are two warnings in chapter 23 (v20 and 21 & v29 to 35). Both sections contain no prohibition but rather a warning about excess (‘too much wine’, ‘gorge’ v20 and ‘drunkards and gluttons’ v21). In the second section the author poses a collection of rhetorical questions. There are general descriptions of woe and sorrow and it ends with the hangover problem of eyes that are ‘bloodshot’ (or bleary). We are warned not to ‘linger over wine’ and it should be seen as seductive but it bites like a snake in the end. And its lasting effects are ‘visions’ (v33) and ‘reeling’ (v34) combined with dulled senses mixed with bravado. (v35).

1. This recalls the person who is getting drunk and insists that ‘he can take his drink’ and doesn’t realise he is not thinking straight – therefore not being wise in God’s eyes.

This is a form of addiction and this phenomenon is not limited to drinking habits.

How can we help people who have habits that block out God speaking to them?

It is worth looking at Jesus in relation to wine. After all, his first miracle was to make it when the host ran out of it. (John 2 v 1 to 11). Some have argued that if Jesus drank it, it must be alright for his followers to do the same. Others have argued that the wine wasn’t alcoholic but it was described as ‘the best wine’.

1. What does this narrative tell us about how we should drink alcohol? (if anything?)

What is the main purpose of this miracle? (the reality of the New Creation?)

The miracle at Cana is one of the many ‘signs’ in John’s gospel. It’s not a statement about how much we should drink. Some people ask ‘how far can we go’ questions like how much we can drink or what does God allow sexually. These are the wrong questions. We should always be asking what kind of behaviour would God find most pleasing. The answer from Proverbs would always be that our behaviour should maximise the wisdom we receive from God.

1. When Jesus uses the illustration of wine in Luke 5:37 to 39 what is his point? Everybody in the 1st century would have known that putting new wine in old wineskins was asking for trouble.

Why does Jesus use wine in this context? (When you look at this make sure you realise that, in the 1st century, wine was the main liquid people drank)

We have seen that the Bible never gives a blanket prohibition against alcohol. But drunkenness is never looked at in a good light in the Bible. After the flood Noah grows a vineyard, makes wine, and gets drunk (Genesis 9) Lot is left alone with his daughters and they get him drunk – incestuous children are the result (Genesis 19:30 to 37). In Ephesians 5:18 we are told –‘Don’t be drunk with wine …. but be filled with the Spirit’. As we saw in Proverbs, self-discipline is the key and seeking after God’s wisdom is always the better way. When you’ve sobered up, your problems remain.

1. Why do we people use excessive drinking to ‘drown their sorrows’?

When people are on late-night revels, why is excessive drinking so important?

What can we pray for when we see the city streets at night?