

## What Do You Believe About Alcohol?

One of the most hotly debated topics in the church is the issue of alcohol. While there are many arguments that could be made, we desire to provide clarity on what The Avenue believes based on what we see throughout all of scripture.

### What Does Scripture Actually Say?

When it comes to scripture and alcohol there are a total of 228 references to “Wine,” and 19 references to “Strong-drink,” a total of 247 references. All of these references have a positive, negative or an indifferent connotation about alcohol.

#### Positive Examples in scripture:

- **Psalm 104:14-15 (ESV)** - You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.
- **Isaiah 25:6 (ESV)** - On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
- **John 2:1-10 (ESV)** - On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

#### Negative Examples in Scripture:

- **Proverbs 20:1 (ESV)** - Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.
- **Proverbs 21:17 (ESV)** - Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.
- **Isaiah 5:22 (ESV)** - Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink,

## What Do You Believe About Alcohol?

### Indifferent Examples in Scripture:

- **Genesis 14:18** (ESV) - And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)
- **Deuteronomy 16:13** (ESV) - “You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress.
- **1 Timothy 5:23** (ESV) - No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. (while there may be some physical benefits this passage is morally neutral)

### How Should the Christian View Alcohol?

There are at least three possibilities as to how a Christian could respond to the question of alcohol since there is not a direct command against drinking alcohol in scripture, nor is there a direct command to drink alcohol in scripture (besides Paul’s encouragement to Timothy above in 1 Timothy 5:23). So we must take a look at each of these positions to see what the scriptures are teaching us.

#### Total Freedom

Those who believe in total freedom suggest there are no limits to drinking alcohol and would not prohibit drunkenness. We believe that scripture is very clear about drunkenness. Drunkenness is sinful (Ephesians 5:18, 1 Peter 4:3, Romans 13:13) and believers in Christ are not to become intoxicated. Drunkenness is viewed as the flesh overpowering the Spirit in a person’s life. Alcohol like any other thing on earth can be an idol. The nature of escape associated with alcohol makes it a “quick idol” for people to run to. While we have freedom in Christ we are not exemplifying what it means to be “in Christ” if we run to other gods to find our peace.

#### Abstinence

Those who believe in abstinence believe that because alcohol is so divisive, we should not drink at all. This is commonly referred to as “The Weaker Brother Argument.” This argument bases itself on Paul’s argument about eating meat sacrificed to idols in Romans 14. This line of argumentation discredits the grace that Paul gives in this passage - by proposing that total abstinence is the only way to ensure that no one around us may stumble.

The problem with this line of debate is that alcohol is the only sin where such drastic measures are prescribed. We don’t cease from eating because someone in our church struggles with gluttony. We don’t stop talking entirely because a church member struggles with gossip. There are even scriptural prescriptions against such limitations (Colossians 2:16-23).

Some might argue that eating and speaking are things we must do and drinking alcohol is a choice which can be sacrificed for the good of others. It is true that some of these examples aren’t really choices. But we could extend that line of thought into almost any area. Anything can be done in a way that makes it a sin. Because of this, we must work toward being responsible with how we eat, drink, speak and act instead of prohibiting it all together.

## What Do You Believe About Alcohol?

### **Moderation**

The Avenue believes the most scriptural position to hold on the question of alcohol is that of moderation & responsibility. We believe that scripture teaches responsibility regarding all matters of food, drink and life.

We, as Paul teaches us, must not be mastered by anything that detracts from Christ. (I Corinthians 6:12-13) This position requires one of humility and grace, because there is not a clear line of what is too much for one person. It requires discernment and maturity. We embrace the individual right of people to consume alcohol in a responsible fashion and the individuals who feel as a matter of their own conscious that they should not partake of alcohol.

### **Practical considerations:**

Now that we have looked into the Scriptures to determine what they say about alcohol and its consumption, we are compelled to put forth some practical considerations they may provide further clarity on this issue:

- **Substance abuse**

If you have a history of substance abuse it may be good for you to abstain from alcohol for your own benefit; so you don't fall into sin. Alcohol can be addictive. If you are struggling with substance abuse, please connect with a Pastor.

- **Minors and alcohol**

We believe that consumption of alcohol should only be consumed by those of age. This would be consistent with teachings in scripture about honoring the laws of authorities.

- **Discretion**

While you have freedom, we do believe there are times in which you should abstain. You would not have a drink at a school or at an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting. If an educational institution (seminary), organization or event prohibits alcohol use, you should honor the requests of those groups and any agreements that you sign. There might be other times that such discretion should be used. Be sensitive to how God leads you and please do not become contentious or divisive.

- **Amount of alcohol**

This again is somewhat subjective. Some would say a drink an hour; others would say the affects of your consumption should not be visible to those around you. The police department has a blood alcohol content measurement which would apply to you if you are driving. Our encouragement would be that your consumption would be in line with your responsibilities (driving, parenting), your health and your ability to completely hear from the Holy Spirit. You should also maintain complete control of all of your faculties (senses, speech, walking).

## What Do You Believe About Alcohol?

### **Conclusion**

The Bible reveals to us through the Gospel that we are being renewed from our sinful patterns and nature into a renewed spiritual consciousness with God. Food, drink and alcohol were created by God to be enjoyed within certain limits by His creation. It can be used as an element in worship, celebration and thanksgiving all of which are appropriate, God honoring responses of the believer.

All of us are accountable to God for our actions and all of our actions should spring outward from faith. For some, faith leads us to abstinence. For others, it will lead us to moderation. Regardless of our convictions, let us remember to do 1 Corinthians 10:31 and “...whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

### **What Does This Mean Practically?**

#### **Love God, Love others**

Glorifying and honoring God has to be our number one priority. If our gatherings become more about drinking than they do loving God and loving others, than we are out of balance.

Loving others means if I know someone struggles with alcohol, I’ll choose not to have any at my event because I love that person more than my wants and desires.

Please be open to continually evaluating the needs of those in our church and stewarding over what God has entrusted to us with moderation and grace.

#### **“Avenue Sponsored Events”**

Those who attend an “Avenue Sponsored Event” - something that is promoted in announcements, bulletin and/or email should not expect alcohol to be present unless it is an event where alcohol is typically present (i.e., an art gala, bowling alley, sporting event, etc.)

We encourage our leaders and those who are a part of the Avenue family to use strong discernment about the use of alcohol at Gospel Communities, simple “get-togethers” or other times of community throughout the week.