

A Theology of Alcohol

What We Can All Agree On

Whether a believer is a prohibitionist (one who believes alcohol is expressly forbidden in Scripture), an abstentionist (one who believes alcohol is not totally forbidden in Scripture, but because of reasons related to society and conscience, believes it is better to totally abstain), or a moderationist (one who believes Scripture permits drinking in moderation), there are at least three things all parties can agree on:

First, drunkenness is a sin. Both the Old and New Testaments make this abundantly clear (Pr 20:1, Is 28:1, Rom 13:13, Gal 5:19-21). To be intoxicated by any beverage – whether wine, beer, champagne, liquor or whatever else – is morally wrong before God.

Second, we can also agree that alcohol – both today and in the biblical times – is widely abused by many people. This fact is upheld by statistics on drinking and deaths and the many scriptural warnings against its abuse. This fact has not changed from the time of the Old Testament through the present day.

Third, God’s Word is the final, ultimate, and absolute authority on all moral and doctrinal matters (2 Tim 3:16-17). Our own experiences, our own traditions, and our own emotions are not to be the deciding factors in the debate on alcohol. Only God’s Word has absolute authority to speak on this matter.

With these matters of agreement in mind, we will seek to examine the biblical evidence concerning alcohol.

The Biblical Evidence

The first logical step would be to examine the way the various words for intoxicating drinks such as “wine” are used in both the Old and New Testaments. Among the various considerations will be: Are all words translated “wine” (and the like) always referring to a fermented drink? Are all references to consuming fermented drinks negative? Can leaders drink fermented beverages? Four of the most significant Old Testament words in relation to this topic will be considered, in order of their usage, as well as several New Testament words and two further Scripture passages.

1. Yayin (יַיִן) – typically translated “wine” in the Old Testament

The most frequent word translated “wine” in the Old Testament is *yayin*. This word is used 141x in the Old Testament.

All lexicons surveyed clearly understand *yayin* as an intoxicating beverage (BDB, NIDOTTE, TWOT, Holladay). Furthermore, there is abundant evidence in Scripture that *yayin* is to be understood as a fermented beverage (Gen 9:21, 1 Sam 1:14, Pr 20:1).

This is significant, especially regarding the usage of the term in both literal and metaphorical contexts. The Bible warns not to be intoxicated by *yayin* (Pr 20:1, 23:20). However, we also see that *yayin* is encouraged to be used in celebration and was used in worship as an offering (Ps 104:15; Ex 29:38-40, which does imply that it was regularly expected to be made, or at least purchased, by Israelites). Its presence in Israel is an indication of divine blessing (Ps 104:14-15, Pr 3:10), and its absence an indication of divine curse (Dt 28:39).

There are those who argue that these positive usages of *yayin* are referring to a non-fermented usage of the Hebrew word, and that the negative warnings are referring to the

fermented usage of the word (“two-wine theory”). However, this argument falters on several grounds. First, it is simply bad exegesis to read your theology into the lexical meaning and practical usage of a word. One does not have to be a scholar to see a problem with the methodology that argues that if it’s a negative reference, it’s wine, and if it’s positive, it’s grape juice. Second, there are several passages that use *yayin* in both a positive and negative way *in the same context* (see 1 Sam 25:18/37). It is special pleading to argue that the same author, within the space of a few verses, is using a single word in two different ways without contextual reason to say so (theological bias is not a contextual reason).

There are several times in Scripture where the use of *yayin* is discouraged among leaders. Leviticus 10:8-11 restricts priests from drinking *yayin*. It should be noted here that *yayin* is restricted from being used by the priests *only when they are in service* (note the clarifying phrase in vs 9, “when you come into the tent of meeting”). “In service” is meant in the sense of presently engaging in ministry activities, not simply “a spiritual leader” (against those who argue spiritual leaders are always in “active service”). This command follows the sin of Nadab and Abihu, perhaps suggesting that their sin unto death was, at least in part, drunkenness. For those who think that the Leviticus passage is restricting priests from partaking in wine altogether, it should be pointed out that God allows the priests in particular to take some of the *yayin* for themselves from the offerings of the people (Num 18:12, 27, 30).

Numbers 6:1-4 restricts Nazirites from partaking in *yayin* or any grapes (see also Judges 13:4). Several observations about this are in order: 1) *yayin* in verse 3 is specifically distinct from “grape juice,” indicating it is alcoholic; 2) the Nazirite was a special class of people specially devoted to the Lord *for a specific time*. The Nazirite vow was temporary (except in the case of Samson). This indicates that *not all Israelites were restricted from drinking wine*. And even the Nazirite was not restricted for life.

Proverbs 31:4-5 is a warning for kings against becoming drunk with *yayin*. The connecting particle in verse 5 qualifies verse 4 with a reason that kings should not abuse *yayin*: it will cloud their decision-making and judgment. Therefore, just as the priests were not to drink *yayin* while on duty, it seems that this passage indicates kings should not drink while on duty either.

To summarize, to be intoxicated from *yayin* is a sin, but it is not a sin to partake in moderation. Abstinence from drinking *yayin* is not required by the Lord in any Scripture, even for leaders, with the exception of leaders actively serving before the Lord or people who have made special temporary vows before God.

2. *Tirosh* (תִּירוֹשׁ) – typically translated “new wine” in the Old Testament

The word *tirosh* is used 38x in the Old Testament. It is frequently translated “new wine” and denotes a less-fermented variety of *yayin*.

It is important to note that the vast majority of references to *tirosh* in the Old Testament are overwhelmingly positive. Like *yayin*, its presence indicates blessing from God (Dt 33:28) and its removal indicates a curse (Dt 28:51). Like *yayin*, this word is also used in Nazirite passages, where the same conclusions drawn for *yayin* would apply to *tirosh*.

But is it fermented? The only negative reference to *tirosh* in Scripture indicates that it, like *yayin*, can be abused as a fermented drink (Hos 4:11). This reference itself is clear that *tirosh* can be considered alcoholic, though probably not to the extent of *yayin*. Furthermore, the LXX frequently translates both *yayin* and *tirosh* into the Greek *oinos*, which we will see has the same semantic range as *yayin*.

Therefore, it can be concluded that *tirosh*, though less fermented than *yayin*, still has alcoholic properties and is considered a great blessing from God.

3. *Shekar* (שֶׁכָּר) – typically translated “strong drink” in the Old Testament

The word *shekar* is used 22x in the Old Testament. Its root is the same for the word “drunkenness.” If *tirosh* is a less-fermented *yayin*, it seems that *shekar* is the more potent variety, although it is uncertain whether the product comes from the grapevine or not.

Most biblical uses of this word are negative, referring to intoxication by too much consumption of *shekar* (Is 5:11, 28:7). It, like *yayin* and *tirosh*, are used in the Nazirite and priestly contexts in similar fashion.

Surprisingly, there are several positive references to the use of *shekar* in Scripture. Numbers 28:7 indicates *shekar* is used as an offering, which again implies it was regularly made (or at least purchased) by godly Israelites and possibly (though not explicitly) consumed by the priests as allowed for in Numbers 18. Proverbs 31:6 also uses it in a positive way, indicating that it could be used medicinally to help the dying.

Deuteronomy 14:26 is especially helpful in this study. In context, God is instructing the Israelites that if they live too far from the Tabernacle to bring their crops as a tithe, they can exchange the tithe for money, then use the money to purchase “whatever your heart desires” (2x). Included in “whatever your heart desires” is “oxen, or sheep, or wine (*yayin*), or strong drink (*shekar*).” The command then follows that the Israelite is to “eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household.” Earlier, this passage even states that “new wine” (*yayin*) is to be consumed before God in worship (14:23). This is without a doubt a positive reference to the purchase and consumption (as a family, in the worship setting) of *tirosh*, *yayin* and *shekar* (all alcoholic drinks).

To summarize, *shekar* is highly alcoholic, and the *abuse* of it is highly condemned, but the *use* of it is certainly not condemned, but instead allowed for in an appropriate setting.

4. *Asis* (אֶסִּיס) – typically translated “sweet wine” in the Old Testament

The word *asis* is used only 5x in the Old Testament. It is typically seen by lexicons to be newly expressed juice, mainly from the grape (namely, grape juice). In fact, it is even translated once as “juice” (SS 8:2). However, even this word is used as an intoxicant in at least two references (Joel 1:5, Is 49:26). This is significant, for the other two references are positive references that indicate *asis* is a blessing from God (Joel 3:18, Am 9:13).

Therefore, *asis*, like the other words surveyed, is intoxicating (though not nearly as much as *shekar*) and is still an indication of blessing from God.

5. Summary of Old Testament

From this brief survey, we have seen several important points:

- 1 – Drunkenness is condemned as sin.
- 2 – The use of fermented beverages is not expressly condemned, even for leaders, and even for “harder” beverages.
- 3 – Certain people (namely, priests and Nazirites) are required to abstain during special times (namely, during service and during the period of their vow, respectively).

Several New Testament words and other passages of Scripture will now be discussed.

6. *Oinos* (οἶνος) – typically translated “wine” in the New Testament

Oinos is the Greek equivalent of *yayin* (and sometimes *tirosh* in the LXX). Classical Greek usage, as well as all major lexicons, agree that *oinos* is a fermented beverage (BAGD, Thayer, Louw-Nida, etc).

As in the Old Testament, drunkenness by *oinos* (or any other means) is forbidden in the New Testament (Rev 17:2). And as in the Old Testament, it is *not* forbidden to partake in *oinos* as long as it is not abused. In fact, there is a significant amount of evidence that alcoholic *oinos* was consumed not only by the early church (including the spiritual leaders), but by Jesus Himself.

First, the evidence of the church. It is clear that the church was not to use wine to get drunk (Eph 5:18). However, it is also clear that the church, even the leadership (elders and deacons), were allowed some *oinos* since the prohibition in passages such as 1 Timothy 3:8 and Titus 2:3 are against using “much” *oinos*. The “much” (πολύς) in these passages is an adjective, qualifying *oinos* and indicating that *oinos* is allowed, just not “much” of it (for a discussion of how much is too much, see below). That this *oinos* is alcoholic is clear by the words “or addicted to” that preface “much *oinos*” in 1 Timothy 3:8. One does not get addicted to grape juice, however “much” they consume.

Likewise, 1 Timothy 3:3 (and the Titus 1:7 parallel) uses a word that means, “one who is given to drinking too much wine, *addicted to wine, drunken*” (BAGD 780). The elder/pastor is not commanded to avoid drinking wine altogether, but rather he is commanded to be one who is not drunk with wine or addicted to it.

Next is the evidence of Jesus. Jesus not only drank wine, but He also made wine (and a lot of it, at that). When John the Baptist was born, John was said to “drink no wine or liquor” (Lk 1:15). This is significant, for in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus *contrasts* Himself with John the Baptist in 7:33-34: “For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no *oinos*, and you say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man has come eating *and drinking*, and you say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” The contrast makes no sense unless Jesus ate and drank that which John the Baptist did not eat and drink: bread and *oinos*. It also makes no sense that the Pharisees would call Jesus a “drunkard” if what He drank was only non-alcoholic grape juice.

We add to this the evidence from John 2. Here Jesus changed over 100 gallons of water into *oinos*. The response of the headwaiter is significant. He notes that usually people serve the “good *oinos*” first. This statement most naturally means “the most alcoholic wine.” The cheaper, less alcoholic wine would be served later, after people have “drunk freely” (μεθύω, literally: “have become drunk”). These statements are most naturally taken to mean that most hosts serve cheaper, less alcoholic beverages after the guests are inebriated. (It should be noted that the headwaiter does not make the direct accusation that the guests at this particular wedding were inebriated at this point). Some argue that the *oinos* here is special non-alcoholic “wine.” But there is no contextual or lexical warrant for this conclusion. There is no reason to read the “good wine” mentioned second in verse 10 as anything different than the natural meaning of “good wine” at the beginning of the same verse.

In addition to all of this, it is said of Jesus that at the Last Supper He partook of the “fruit of the vine” (Mt 26:29 and parallels) with the disciples. Some proponents of alcohol have argued that since there is nothing leavened allowed during Passover, this could not have been a fermented beverage Jesus drank. However, not only do modern Jews make a distinction between what is fermented and what is leavened (as admitted even by anti-alcohol proponents like Reynolds, 108), but ancient Jewish sources (like the Mishna) also make it clear that *oinos* is the

equivalent of *yayin* (Gentry 80). This would certainly help explain the problem that the Corinthian church had in abusing the elements of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11.

To summarize, *oinos* is the NT equivalent of OT *yayin* in both content (alcoholic) and permitted usage (it can be used, but not abused). Church leaders are not forbidden to partake in *oinos*, and there is evidence that even Jesus drank and produced it.

7. Other Old and New Testament Words

There are several other words in both the Old and New Testament that are translated "wine" or the like, including *gluekos* (γλεύκος; Ac 2:13) and *hemer* (חֶמֶר, Dt 32:14). These words are rare and add relatively little value to the discussion at hand.

8. Two Further Points

Two more things must be said about alcohol before addressing some further passages on the subject. First, after surveying the usages of the words for alcoholic beverages in the Old and New Testaments, it is clear that *yayin* and *oinos* both have medicinal qualities which are encouraged to be taken advantage of for the benefit of the believer. Proverbs 31:6 encourages "strong drink" (*shekar*) and "wine" (*yayin*) to the dying and bitter of life. Paul encourages Timothy to use a little *oinos* for the sake of his stomach and frequent ailments (1 Tim 5:23). The Good Samaritan pours *oinos* on the wound of the beaten Jew (presumably to thwart infection; Lk 10:34). It should be noted that many of these passages imply that the substance in question is alcoholic (what good would it be to pour grape juice on a wound?). Therefore, alcohol is useful and encouraged for medicinal purposes.

Second, it should also be noted that the substance is not evil in itself. No substance is "unclean" or evil in itself (Rom 14:14-20, Mk 7:14-23). Beverages can be abused, as just about every other substance known to man has been abused or made into an idol. But this does not make the substance itself evil.

9. Proverbs 23:29-35

Anti-alcohol advocates like Stephen Reynolds build their arguments from this passage, mainly because of the statement in verse 31: "Do not look on the wine when it is red." Reynolds argues that this is not metaphor, that it refers to all people and not just to drunks, and that it is the controlling verse with the clearest meaning upon which all other verses regarding alcohol should be interpreted (Reynolds, *The Biblical Approach to Alcohol*, 3-10). It is important, then, to single out this passage and understand it correctly in this debate.

The passage begins in verse 29 with rhetorical questions that ask who has contentions, complaining, wounds and redness of the eyes. These, in turn, are answered in verse 30, which clearly refers to drunkards ("those who linger long over wine"). So the context is referring to those who abuse alcohol by getting drunk. Verse 31, then, rightly admonishes the drunkard to not dwell on ("look on") wine while it is "red" (alcoholic – an interpretation that both sides of the debate typically agree on). Verses 32-35 then proceed to warn the drunkard of the dangers of alcoholism.

This passage, then, like all others in Scripture, neither prohibits drinking wine nor prohibits looking at wine. It is an admonition against *abusers* of wine – drunkards – that warns them of the dangerous effects of alcohol and warns them not to set their mind or eyes on the substance if it leads them to sin.

10. Romans 14 (and 1 Corinthians 8-10)

This is a passage that is inevitably brought up in the alcohol debate, mainly because of three elements: 1) the “weaker brother,” 2) the “stumbling block,” and 3) the explicit mention of drinking wine (*oinos*) in Romans 14:21. Because of this, it is helpful to take a brief look at the passage and see how it helps in this debate.

First, Paul begins in Romans 14:1-4 by discussing those who are “weak in faith” versus those who are not (presumably, those who are “strong”). The “weak in faith” is described as one who is convicted that they must follow a practice that is not required of a believer, such as abstaining from meat, wine and observing Jewish holidays. The one who is “strong” realizes that all food/beverages have been considered “clean” (14:14) and does not sin against his conscience by partaking in them. It should be noted that Paul is *not* saying that the weak are weak because they will get drunk, but that they are considered weak *because of their conscience*. This is an important distinction to keep in mind.

To the strong, the admonition is given in 14:1 and 3 that he “accept” and does not “regard with contempt” the weak. To the weak, the admonition is given “not to judge” the strong, “for God has accepted him” (14:3). So it is important to see that this passage *is not just for the “strong” believer who drinks*, but there is a command for the weak believer who abstains not to judge the strong who does not abstain from alcohol. This, of course, speaks volumes on the practice of excluding from membership those who choose to drink alcohol (namely, those who would be considered “strong” believers).

In verses 5-12, Paul makes the point that both the weak and strong believers act in the way they do “for the Lord.” Ultimately, the believer will give an account to God (not so much regarding their convictions as much as how they *followed* their convictions).

In verse 13, Paul brings the “stumbling block” into discussion. The “obstacle” and “stumbling block” referred to here is not merely something that annoys a fellow believer, or an issue of disagreement between believers, but it is something that the strong believer does that causes the weak believer to sin against his conscience. Verse 14 clarifies this by saying that the actual act of eating the “unclean” thing isn’t sin in itself, but it *is* if the weak believer’s conscience is guilty by the act. Paul then warns the strong believer that he does not “hurt” or “destroy” the weak with his actions (14:15). The next few verses reiterate this principle, that the believer should be careful not to let their freedom and liberty to eat/drink cause another believer to stumble.

Then, in verse 21, Paul makes the statement, “It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.” We could add to this 1 Corinthians 8:13 where Paul says he would “never eat meat again” if it caused his brother to stumble. Is this a command to total abstinence from alcohol (and, we could add, meat)? Grammatically, the verbs in Romans 14:21 are aorists. Had they been present tense verbs, this might indicate that Paul is saying absolutely that he would continually abstain. But the aorist indicates that Paul is talking about a specific instance – namely, the instance in which the weaker brother might be caused to stumble. Permanent abstinence is not at stake here. But what of 1 Corinthians 8:13? This is not a proof-text for total abstinence either, for it must be qualified by his reasons for not eating/drinking (which are – in the case of Romans 14 – not causing a believer to stumble and – in the case of 1 Corinthians 8 – winning the lost for Christ; cf 1 Cor 9:20-23) as well as qualified by other texts that speak on the matter (such as those already surveyed that permit alcohol consumption by leaders, etc). Furthermore, in the Romans 14 passage, the next two verses confirm that the strong believer is “happy” if he doesn’t condemn himself regarding what is permissible by God.

There is not, therefore, a hidden weaker brother hiding in every shadow, crouching in every corner. The strong Christian who drinks moderately is not told to live life in fear of someone seeing him walk into a liquor store, or fear of a weaker brother stumbling upon his secret and subsequently stumbling into sin. The strong believer isn't even told to bend their will to every naysayer that disagrees with his position on drinking (indeed, some naysayers might even be Pharisaical who are attempting to manipulate and control and make themselves look holier than thou. It is thus necessary to carefully distinguish between the Pharisee and the weaker brother).

So we see that Paul doesn't characteristically condemn all drinking. He warns the strong that their freedom should be used carefully so as not to cause the weak to stumble. He also warns the weak not to judge the strong for drinking. The very fact that Paul ends the way he does in verse 22 indicates that even though there are weak believers out there, the strong do not need to give up all of their liberties at all times in their life, but just when their freedoms could cause a weaker brother to stumble into sin.

Common Objections

There are several common objections to the moderationist's position on alcohol. They will be briefly mentioned and addressed.

1. Alcohol in biblical times was diluted with water (or certainly less potent than it is today). So even if the Bible allows for moderate drinking, it would not apply to today's drinks.

The major problem with this argument is that it makes the assumption that alcohol back then was diluted (and typically enjoyed that way). But this is far from proven and not necessarily even the norm. There are a few extra-biblical sources that say wine was diluted, and a few that say otherwise. They are by no means uniform in their voice. In addition, the *biblical* evidence that we have *is* uniform: mixing water with alcohol is looked upon negatively (Is 1:22). The "mixed wine" that is sometimes referred to in the Old Testament is wine mixed with spices, not diluted with water (Ps 65:8).

A further problem with this argument is that it seems to ignore the fact that people still got drunk in biblical times as well. Drunkenness was a problem either way, whether with a high or low alcohol content in the beverage. The content was not so low that people could not abuse it back then, just as they do today.

2. Granted 1 Timothy 3:3 and 3:8 warn against not being addicted and not consuming "much" wine, but how much is too much? How buzzed can a person get before they are sinning?

As one author put it, "to ask these questions is not to answer them" (Gentry 134). Because some people think it is impossible to quantify what constitutes "drunkenness" (whether it's the legal alcohol limit or something else), they have argued that we should abstain altogether. But this argument fails on several levels. First, if this were true, why would only "much" wine be prohibited? Why wouldn't Paul have required absolute abstinence? Second, we might compare this with other similar issues that might enlighten the situation. For example, take gluttony, which is the overabundance of food consumption. Gluttony is clearly a sin (Pr 23:2). But how much food does a person have to eat before he is a glutton? Should a person abstain from all food because some abuse it or because it is difficult to quantity the difference between being full and being a glutton? It seems that each person and body type and personality type

(and spiritual maturity) has different limits on what they can handle before they get out of control. Everyone must eat and drink in moderation.

3. Some people have a predisposition to alcohol – one drink and they are hooked for life. Isn't it like playing Russian Roulette even taking one drink, not knowing if you are a 'Potential Drunk'?

It should be noted, in response to this argument, that Jesus did not have this concern. Nor did Paul. Nor did any of the writers on the Old or New Testament. Whether or not someone is predisposed to a certain substance, it is still a matter of personal responsibility how they act towards that substance. Taking one drink, even for someone supposedly predisposed to being an alcoholic, does not mean that they *must* or *cannot help but* to take another drink, and another, until they are drunk. This may be a reason why an individual is convicted to abstain, but this is not a reason to require all to abstain.

4. Leviticus 10:8-11 prohibits priests from drinking, and Proverbs 31:4-5 prohibits kings from drinking. Since believers in the New Testament are both kings and priests (Rev 1:6), doesn't this mean we should always abstain from alcohol too?

There are several logical problems with this argument. First, it ignores the fact that priests were only prohibited from drinking while on duty (see above discussion). There is good reason to believe the king was prohibited in this manner too (see the above discussion). Second, this is taking the metaphor of the believer being a king/priest too far. Figures of speech are meant to convey something in particular, not everything in particular. Since we are priests, do we also need to wear a turban made of fine linen (Ex 28:39)? Since we are kings, do we also need to avoid increasing our silver or gold and not own any horses (Dt 17:14-17)? The biblical authors are not saying that we are literal priests and kings in the Old Testament sense. Third, and to prove the second point, if this were true that we are priests/kings that are not allowed to drink, then why not prohibit drinking explicitly instead of only prohibiting drunkenness and “much” wine, as the New Testament does?

5. Aren't there health concerns to drinking even small amounts of alcohol? I heard that alcohol irreparably kills brain cells.

The most that can be said about this argument is that it is not conclusive. There are scholarly medical articles about alcohol being dangerous to the brain and articles about alcohol having beneficial effects on the brain, stomach and heart. And again, why would Paul tell Timothy to take some wine if it caused brain damage? Why would pastors be allowed to drink without getting drunk if it was inherently unhealthy? This is not a biblical argument; it is an unfounded scientific argument.

6. Alcoholism today is a major problem, more so than it was back when the Bible was written, and more so than in other parts of the world. Therefore, it is wise for all of us to abstain so that we don't cause anyone to stumble.

First, this argument tends to pretend that alcoholism wasn't a problem in the biblical times. But if that were the case, why all the commands against drunkenness? And why would Jesus partake in alcohol when there were people who abused the substance around Him watching? Even if alcohol abuse is more of a problem today than it was thousands of years ago, this does not change what the *timeless* truths in the Bible say about the use of alcohol. Paul did

not tell us to change the way we live because some people might get the wrong impression; he told us to change our actions if it causes another believer to stumble or if it might erase a point of contention that would more easily enable a believer to win over an unbeliever.

An analogy might be helpful. Infidelity is also arguably worse today than it was 2000 years ago when Jesus and the New Testament writers condemned it. If enjoying sex (a biblically permissible thing in the right context) can lead to infidelity, should we condemn all sexual activity? If enjoying food (a biblically permissible thing in the right context) can lead to gluttony, should we condemn all eating? If enjoying alcohol (a biblically permissible thing in the right context) can lead to drunkenness, does it necessarily follow that we must condemn all drinking of alcohol? These analogies were not haphazardly chosen; the sin of drunkenness is often found side-by-side with the sin of gluttony (Pr 23:21, Dt 21:20) and infidelity (Rom 13:13, 1 Pt 4:3).

7. Even if the Bible doesn't condemn all alcohol use, the local church has a right to ask members to abstain.

This argument will be answered in a tongue-in-cheek manner. The church has a right to ask members to abstain...

... as much as the Pharisees had a right to ask Jesus and His disciples not to pick heads of grain on the Sabbath (Mt 12:1-8).

... as much as a church has a right to ask members not to eat Oreos because it might lead others to gluttony amidst the fattest nation on earth.

... as much as a church has a right to ignore Paul's command for the weak not to judge the strong that God has accepted (Rom 14:3).

8. Abstinence from drinking alcohol is preferred because it shows other members of the community (believers and unbelievers) that we hold a higher standard.

To this we might ask, *A higher standard than what?* Than the Bible? Is it not Pharisaical to require of members to abstain from something the Bible does not ask us to abstain from? And even if, after all the preceding evidence, one still thinks that the Bible *does* ask us to abstain from alcohol, does not the principles in Romans 14 apply to that weaker believer, that they should not judge the one who drinks moderately? This position is a "holier than thou" position that would best be served being compared to other similar stances. What would we say of a church that required their male members not to cut their hair, since Nazirites did this in the Old Testament? We would likely say that church is requiring too much.

Conclusions

It will be helpful to summarize several conclusions from this study of what the Bible teaches concerning alcoholic substances.

1. Drunkenness is clearly a sin. There are many cautions in Scripture regarding the abuse of fermented beverages and the dangers of misusing alcohol.
2. However, fermented beverages are not explicitly condemned as evil, and the believer is not explicitly commanded to abstain. Rather, the beverage itself is commended on many occasions and is an indication of a blessing from God.

3. Spiritual leaders (and those who have taken special vows) are to abstain while actively serving before the people (i.e. on a Sunday morning, before counseling, etc), though they are not required to avoid all alcoholic drink.
4. All believers are called to be true to their convictions, whether they believe drinking is a sinful choice for themselves or not. The strong believer (who drinks) should not cause the weaker believer (who abstains) to stumble into sin by guiltning their conscience. Likewise, the weak believer should not judge the strong believer for his choices.
5. Therefore, all believers – whether leaders or not – are permitted by the freedom of Scripture to consume alcohol in moderation, with the stipulations that it does not lead to drunkenness, it does not cause another to stumble, and it is not done while they are actively serving God.