

# What's So Bad About A Little Alcohol?

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Reading Time: 7 minutes

This is not just another article detailing all the bad stuff that accompanies drinking. Countless homes have been broken up, children abused, reputations destroyed, and innocent lives ruined or lost due to the vices of alcohol use. The statistics are readily available and speak for themselves. No reasonable person can dispute the caustic effects of this poison on society. Would not the world be a better place without beverage alcohol?

Beer advertisements often end with the phrase, “drink responsibly.” Yet, even *one* drink is irresponsible. The only responsible course of action is to stay away from beverage alcohol entirely.

## Drunkenness vs. Sober-mindedness

Here's an easy question: **Is it sinful to get drunk?** Yes. Very clearly, the Bible often condemns drunkenness (cf. Deut. 21:20-21; Prov. 20:1; Prov. 23:20, 29-35; Isaiah 5:11, 22; 28:7; Hab. 2:15; Deut. 29:5-6; Eph. 5:18; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Tim. 3:3; Rom. 13:13; 1 Pet. 4:3; Titus 1:7-8; etc.). This is not disputed. Drunkenness is a sin that will keep one out of heaven.

Appreciate now that no part of God's law is pointless. All of God's laws are for our good.

Christians—by virtue of their faithfulness to the law of Christ—can live the most abundant life (John 10:10). There is a strong correlation between the quality of one’s life and one’s fidelity to God’s law (Psa. 1:3). **There is a reason behind every one of God’s commands.**

With that being said, take a moment to consider this follow-up question: **Why? Why does the Bible condemn drunkenness?**

The main reason we could give, without a doubt, is that **drunkenness is the very antithesis to sober-mindedness.** To be a Christian requires a lucid and fully engaged mind. Christianity is a *thinking* way of life.

- We are to love God with all of our *mind* (Mark 12:30).
- We are to be transformed by the renewing of our *mind* (Rom. 12:2).
- We are to set our *mind* on things above (Col. 3:2).
- We are to *meditate* on things virtuous & praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

Peter commands Christians to “be sober, be vigilant” (1 Pet. 5:8). What would be the opposite of sober in this context? Dull. Asleep. Unaware. Inebriated. Foolish. Thoughtless. Careless. Apathetic.

We are to “keep awake and be sober” (1 Thess. 5:6). Contextually, this means we need to live in view of eternity. The Lord’s return is imminent, and we need **to live in a vigilant, discerning way** so that when He comes, we are found faithful. This requires the full use of our faculties. We take every thought captive for Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). We are to be “self-controlled” (*sōphronōs*, sometimes translated *sober*), “upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:12). That is, we are to be in **full control of ourselves** as we claim to live holy lives, consecrated to the Lord (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13). **We should be wary of anything, however slight, that will rob us of as clear a mind as possible.**

Sometimes it is observed that the Bible does not explicitly prohibit the use of recreational marijuana or other illicit drugs.<sup>1</sup> Here, we beg to differ. The Bible condemns the use of recreational drugs and alcohol—along with the abuse of prescription medication—**in every single passage that commands Christians to have a sober mind.** Any recreation activity that will impair your judgment, intoxicate your mind, lessen your resolve, or sear your conscience is sinful, however socially acceptable it may be.

Maintaining your sobriety is one of the most critical elements of the Christian life. The sober man digs into Scripture. He considers the long-term spiritual consequences of his actions

rather than the short-term physical pleasures. He labors over decisions because holiness is hard mental work. He weighs his actions and doesn't act hastily without thought. He refuses to go with the crowd or subscribe to the philosophy of the day.

In contrast, you don't need to use your brain much to sin. When asked to account for something we did wrong, how often do we answer with the excuse, "I wasn't thinking"? We can be overcome with evil by merely dropping all mental restraints and allowing our lusts to take over (Jas. 1:14-15). A teacup of holiness requires more mental energy than an ocean of evil.

## But what about a glass or two of beer?

It is often claimed: "The Bible doesn't condemn drinking, it only condemns drunkenness." Because the Bible doesn't specifically pinpoint when drunkenness occurs, people like stating, "the Bible only condemns drunkenness" because it is a slippery statement and thus provides cover.

However, this is not a legitimate argument in favor of "moderate" or "responsible" drinking. In our modern age, we can calculate with great accuracy exactly when drunkenness occurs.

Merriam-Webster defines "drunk" as "having the faculties impaired by alcohol" and "characterized by intoxication."<sup>2</sup> While some people may exhibit characteristics of drunkenness in more subtle ways than others,<sup>3</sup> intoxication by alcohol can be scientifically measured and medically ascertained. Intoxication is when alcohol is absorbed into the blood and circulated to the brain, depriving it of oxygen.<sup>4</sup> **When the amount of alcohol in the blood exceeds the rate at which it can be metabolized by the body, you are officially intoxicated (and thus mentally impaired)—however slight that may be at first.** Intoxication has very little to do with whether you *feel* intoxicated. The Encyclopedia Britannica records "that rate per hour in an average-size man is about half an ounce, or 15ml, of [pure, BG] alcohol."<sup>5</sup> This varies (but not as much as you might think), of course, due to genetics, gender, weight, and the amount of food already in the stomach.

Let's apply this to real life. A dash of vanilla extract (with its incredibly high alcohol content) in your cookie dough isn't going to alter your sobriety—even if you eat the whole batch in one binge with a very large spoon. Your body can metabolize such a small amount of alcohol, keeping the substance from affecting your brain. Yet, if you drink a 12oz glass of Bud Light (the most popular beer in America<sup>6</sup>) in 30 minutes, such a volume of alcohol content in such a period is going to overwhelm the rate the average person's body

(specifically their liver) can filter the poison (15ml/hour), and you will become intoxicated. Even with its relatively low alcohol content, extreme “what ifs” aside, there is too much alcohol in it for your body to metabolize fast enough. The alcohol will reach your brain, depriving it of oxygen, thus causing the onset of drunkenness.

The only sure way *not* to get intoxicated from beverage alcohol (aside from not drinking it in the first place) is to sip on, say, a 12oz glass of beer like piping hot tea at a slow, consistent rate over the course of many hours (and no one drinks alcohol or beer that way). In other words, to drink just one typical glass of wine, beer, or distilled spirit at the rate any normal person would (say within 30 minutes or so) **will render you intoxicated**. Your reasoning skills are impaired. You may not even feel intoxicated, but you are. During the Christian’s waking hours, sobriety must be protected.

## “I don’t drink to get drunk. I just drink to relax.”

But, what is it that makes alcohol so relaxing? Alcohol is a depressant and narcotic drug.<sup>7</sup> It is precisely the intoxication that you are experiencing—when the body is unable to metabolize the alcohol—that relaxes you. That is the onset of **drunkenness**—you know, that word the Bible uses among other sins that will keep one out of heaven (1 Cor. 6:10, Gal. 5:21. 1 Pet. 4:3). There are other ways to relax that don’t involve poisoning your body and minimizing your sober-mindedness.

But someone else says, “But I know my limits, and I don’t get drunk after just one drink.” Bear in mind, alcohol has no effect on the brain until it is absorbed by the digestive system,<sup>8</sup> which means the effects lag consumption.<sup>9</sup> After your first beer, you don’t feel drunk because most of it hasn’t been processed through the alimentary tract. Food works the same way—you are full before you *feel* full; and if you keep eating, you will overdo it before you realize it.

Furthermore, alcohol is a poison that affects your mind’s ability to reason and make rational decisions, particularly moral judgments. It numbs your inhibitions, which is exactly the *last* thing that needs to be happening when you are trying to gauge your alcohol limit. This is why the Bible says “wine is a mocker” (Prov. 20:1). You gamble with the edge, and the closer you get to the edge, the blurrier it becomes. Why would a mature Christian do that? (And therein lies the problem: lack of maturity—seen by one’s willingness to get as close to sin as possible.)

# “Do not get drunk with wine”

Consider the words of Ephesians 5:18, which the ESV perhaps renders most accurately: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” “*Mē methyskesthe oinō*,” literally translated, is perhaps more accurately rendered “do not be getting drunk.” Don’t just avoid *being* drunk—**avoid the trip there altogether.**

This verse demonstrates how the Bible has always been ahead of its time. Even before the chemical compound now known as alcohol (ethanol) was discovered in the 10<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>10</sup> the Holy Spirit communicated divine revelation about intoxication that could be understood regardless of the scientific era. The Last Will & Testament of Jesus says, in other words: Don’t even begin the process that will lead to drunkenness, for that is the antithesis of being led by the Spirit.

For the Spirit to convict you, your mind cannot be impaired. Sober-mindedness is essential to walking by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). What is a sure way to destroy the Spirit’s power over your life? For one, “getting drunk with wine.” The recreational use of narcotics, depressants, and other addictive substances will rob you of your sober-mindedness<sup>11</sup> and will limit His influence in your life. Who wants that?

## Conclusion

Alcohol (just 1 or 2 drinks) impacts sobriety (even if it doesn’t feel like it). Even with a clear mind, the Christian walk is challenging enough as it is. You won’t be able to walk it successfully so long as you are willing to retard your mind’s capacity to reason.

Furthermore, we have not examined the devastating example the Christian sets with an intoxicating beverage in his hand. Yet, the Bible is clear about the importance of the Christian’s influence, and straightforward teaching about this is not difficult to find. If there is controversy about alcohol, it is not because of the facts, but because of the heart. As saints, let us live *sanctified*. Let us strive for what God commands: sober-mindedness.

***[Editor’s Note: Comments are encouraged. But make sure you leave your full name and keep your words relevant to the article. [Click here for our full comments policy.](#)]***

## Footnotes

1. How could it? There was no word for these substances when Scripture was first penned. Similarly, there was no word for “alcohol” in Biblical times, as the chemical substance behind the inebriating effects had yet to be discovered or understood.
2. Merriam-Webster, Inc. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003.
3. “The Definition of Drunkenness.” BMJ 2 (1923), 1269.
4. Leon A Greenberg, “Intoxication and Alcoholism: Physiological Factors,” AAPSS 315 (1958), 24.
5. “Alcohol Consumption,” Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed 10 Jan 2020 <<https://www.britannica.com/print/article/13398>>.
6. Kate Taylor, “Here are the 10 most popular beers in America,” Business Insider. Accessed 10 Jan 2020. <<https://www.businessinsider.com/most-popular-beers-in-america-2018-9#1-bud-light-10>>.
7. Haven Emerson, “What We Have Learned About Alcohol,” PDK 30 (1948), 89.
8. Greenberg, “Intoxication and Alcoholism,” 24.
9. Alex Paton, “ABC of Alcohol: Alcohol in the Body,” BMJ, 330 (2005), 86.
10. Houchang Modanlou, “A Tribute to Zakariya Razi (865-925 AD): An Iranian Pioneer Scholar,” AIM 6 (2008): 674.
11. In contrast to medically prescribed and monitored medication, which, if it affects the mind, is ultimately designed to improve sober-mindedness.