

Hi Billy,

You wrote and asked us: *What does the Bible say about drinking liquor?*

Thousands of years ago, the Babylonians worshipped a wine goddess, Greeks made mead (a fermented honey and water drink), and Indians made a distilled rice drink called sura. According to Wikipedia, the term "liquor" was first used for "an intoxicating alcoholic drink" in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Liquor (distilled alcoholic beverages with higher proof ratings) and other alcoholic beverages (such as beer and wine) were commonly all called "liquor" in the recent past. Currently the distinction between previously fermented then distilled alcoholic beverages and non-distilled alcoholic beverages is usually noted. Although not all alcoholic drinks are now typically called liquor, all alcoholic drinks can cause intoxication or drunkenness, and we will consider alcoholic drinks in general in our findings.

The Bible both has much to say about, and mentions, wine and strong drink numerous times. Words translated as "wine" in English, are mentioned over 200 times in the Scriptures, not to mention words translated as containing "wine," such as winepress or winebibber. For example, frequently used in the Bible is the Hebrew word "yayin," (Strong's #3196) and it is derived from a root word meaning "effervesce" (as in fermenting wine). Proverbs 20:1 (NASB) states, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise."

We are warned in Proverbs 23:21 (NASB), "For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe one with rags." We can see from these verses that excessive consumption of substances, including that of fermented alcoholic drinks, has negative results for our minds and bodies.

Alcohol use, especially if extreme, can make it difficult to honor God with our bodies, as we are told to do in 1 Corinthians 6:20. Since it dulls our senses, slows reaction time, slurs our speech and makes us less mentally sharp, its use can make it difficult to reason together as we are admonished to do in Isaiah 1:18. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 (NAS) we are reminded, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own." Ephesians 5:18, 19 (NLT) warns and encourages, "Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So far we have considered cautionary verses. There are also verses which mention uses for wine. In John 2:1-11, the wedding at Cana, Jesus turned water into wine after his mother told him the wine had run out. Jesus greatly assisted the bridegroom of the wedding by miraculously supplying wine, although the lesson he would thus impart would be far more important. The expectation would be for the Jewish hosts to provide plenty of wine for guests with no hint of running out. This, the first of Jesus' recorded miracles, he of course used as an important picture. When the wine was completely exhausted Jesus instructed the servants to fill six water pots to the brim with water. These were large pots with a capacity of about 18 to 27 gallons each which would have probably been used for guests to wash with. Jesus miraculously changed the water in the filled pots to wine. Water in the Bible is used to denote life, as in Revelation 22:17, "...the water of life..." The Church, Christ's "bride," will be a source of "water" or "life" under Jesus Christ, for all mankind in the coming resurrection when the willing may "drink freely" (Revelation 22:17). Being glorified with Christ as overcoming saints, their once justified nature would reach its zenith in the new and stronger divine nature provided by God for the purpose of assisting Christ in lifting mankind from degradation to perfection. This new wine, instantaneously and marvelously supplied, from water by Jesus symbolizes this new and stronger nature, life, of the saints working together with Christ their Head during the millennial kingdom, and the joys of the kingdom. See Matthew 26:29. Jesus used wine to represent something incredibly wonderful in the picture of the wedding at Cana. We also think he probably partook of the wine along with the other guests rejoicing at the celebration of marriage. Romans 12:15 (ESV) instructs, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."

Jesus partook of “the fruit of the vine,” which may have been fermented wine, at the last supper with his apostles. Matthew 26:29 does not specifically state whether or not it was fermented wine. This “cup” first symbolizes sacrifice and suffering of Jesus which is to be shared in by his true followers, wherever they may be found, during their earthly lives of studying God’s word and laying down their lives in service to God and His truth. Later will come the joys of the kingdom (new wine). The apostles and those Christians following afterward were taught to all drink of Christ’s suffering by the picture of drinking of the fruit of the vine at the last supper. Also in Matthew 26:29, Jesus tells his disciples that he will not drink of the fruit of the vine after that evening until he drinks it new with them in God’s kingdom. This reminds us of Amos 9:13, which states that sweet wine or new wine (depending upon the translation) will drip from the mountains. This indicates the blessed life-giving power of the Lord and his kingdom upon mankind. The Hebrew word in this case is “aciyc,” and indicates “must” or “freshly squeezed grape juice,” “new (sweet) wine,” “as just trodden out” (Strong’s #6071). Here we see another instance where wine is used as a symbol of something wonderfully revitalizing.

1 Timothy 5:23 (NIV) states, “Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.” The suggestion to use a little wine for medicinal purposes in the case of Timothy is in stark contrast to the warnings against overindulgence by heavy drinking. “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.” (Philippians 4:5 KJV)

Sometimes wine is used with a negative symbolic connotation. Revelation 18:3 (NIV) states, “For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.” Here wine indicates a spirit of intoxication of the world and false doctrines employed by Satan to deceive mankind. This spirit of intoxication of error and worldly wisdom, rather than godly wisdom, very early on crept into the church and is now rampant among nominal (those in name only) Christendom, although some of the “Little Flock” God is seeking and preparing may still be in those systems (see Revelation 18:4). Conversely, in Revelation 6:6, the “wine” symbolically indicates something very positive, the pure doctrines of Christ.

In Judges 13:4, Samson’s mother is urged not to drink wine or strong drink while pregnant with Samson. Yet in Numbers 28:7 (Tanakh), we read, “And the drink offering thereof shall be the fourth part of a hin for the one lamb; in the holy place shalt thou pour out a drink offering of strong drink unto the LORD.” Here the drink offering to God Almighty is translated as strong drink.

In Genesis 27:28 (NIV), we read, “May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine.” Psalm 104:15 tells us that wine makes the human heart glad.

What can we glean and conclude from these numerous and varied ways that wine and strong drink are discussed in the Scriptures? The use of wine can be used to symbolize something very good, as in the new wine or sweet wine of the kingdom. In Matthew 26:28, 29 Jesus took the cup of the fruit of the vine and bid his truest followers to partake of it as a symbol of his blood, or life, poured out (sacrificed) for them and the world of mankind, thus showing that they were privileged to share with him in suffering and sacrifice unto death by living their lives as his followers. Jesus’ perfect sacrifice (as a substitution for Adam) was vital to our hope as Hebrews 9:22 tells us that there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. Wine was properly used as an offering to God by the Jews. The use of wine can also symbolize something very bad, such as, intoxication with the spirit of worldliness, (as opposed to Godliness), and error in doctrinal understandings, which will be all done away with in the kingdom.

Wine is not forbidden in the Bible, but drinking to excess causing drunkenness is strongly warned against. 1 Corinthians 6:10 teaches us that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom. Note that it does not say that those that were at one time drunkards will not inherit the kingdom. Verse 11 tells us that some of the Christians Paul was addressing, although walking after God through Jesus at that time, were drunkards prior to being washed by the water of the Word of God.

As Christians, we are at liberty to make decisions on things that the Bible does not strictly forbid us to do. We are at liberty to do all the good we can if we can prove that it is God's will through our study of Scripture (see 2 Timothy 2:15). If a consecrated Christian feels it is proper to drink a moderate amount of wine, following the biblical admonition to be moderate in all things, we do not find scripturally that it is forbidden. However, drinking to excess will cause negative effects on all people, including Christians. Romans 14:21 also warns us that we are not to drink or eat anything that may stumble a brother. If, for example, we have a recovering alcoholic in our midst, we certainly would not want to tempt them or in any way cause them risk or grief. As Christians we may decide it is best to avoid alcohol altogether for our own spiritual and physical well-being and to avoid any possibility of injuring another. The world is currently filled with those who do not have faith in God. The despair this causes leads many to abuse alcohol.

In summation, The Holy Bible mentions "liquor" (alcoholic beverages such as wine) numerous times, though we have only touched on a few examples. Its use is not forbidden, but its abuse is strongly warned against. It seems logical to conclude that Jesus did not ever abuse wine. We would do well to either abstain altogether or only use alcohol with moderation, prudence and great personal responsibility if appropriate.

We hope we have shed some scriptural light on your excellent question and given you some food for thought for your further study of and reasoning on the subject. Please feel free to write us again. Please visit [www.ChristianQuestions.com](http://www.ChristianQuestions.com) to find scriptural advice on a wide variety of questions, as well as hundreds of archived programs with a scriptural perspective. While on our website, please sign up for CQ Rewind. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with a written summary of each CQ program.

We leave you with some quotes we found interesting:

- "Alcohol has drowned more people than all the seas combined."
- "Dignity is one thing that cannot be preserved in alcohol."
- "Having a drink does not drown a care but waters it to grow faster."
- "Much drinking, little thinking."
- "Wine is a turncoat. First it's a friend, then a deceiver and in the end, an enemy."
- "Alcohol kills everything living and preserves that which is dead."

Please feel free to share with us your own studies on this subject!

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