

The Journey Church

Positional Statement: Alcohol

Alcohol has been a part of human society since the dawn of civilization. Mankind discovered the fermentation process by observing the natural decay process of grains, fruits, and tubers. Throughout history mankind has perfected the fermentation process to produce a variety of beers, ales, grogs, wines, and liquors for human consumption. In addition to human consumption, alcohol has been and is still used for medicinal purposes, for ceremonial and social events, manufacturing (pre and post industrial revolution), and for general purpose cleaning and disinfecting.

At the time of Jesus, history (and Scripture) demonstrates the widespread use of alcohol by all societies and cultures. Alcohol, predominately in the form of wine was a commodity traded heavily and used primarily for human consumption. Often wine was a primary source of hydration as water sources and supplies were often fouled by human waste. The Romans devised an aqua duct system to bring in fresh water from distant mountain streams; however, this system did not supply water for the entire population. Alcohol served other purposes at the time of Jesus as well. Alcohol was used in alcohol lamps, for cleaning the body of a dead family member before burial, for medicinal purposes and for various ceremonial and social purposes. At the time of Jesus, the medicinal advantages of alcohol were well known. Alcohol was known to lower blood pressure and heart rate, to assist and improve digestion, to enhance liver and kidney function, to suppress the cough reflex, disinfected wounds and was used as an aseptic by early medical practitioners. Also known at the time of Jesus were the negative effects of excessive consumption of alcohol on human behavior. Scripture even describes and discusses the ill effects of the abuse and/or misuse of consumed alcohol.

It should be made clear that wine described in Scripture is in fact wine, it is not grape juice. If one ventures to the original language of the bible, there existed a word for wine and word for grape juice, and the word for wine was used in scripture. It is interesting; the first miracle performed by Jesus was turning water into a very fine wine for a wedding celebration at the prompting of his mother. Scripture does not rule for or against the use of alcohol, and obviously recognizes that alcohol is part of human society and culture. However, Scripture describe the negative effects of the misuse or abuse (drunkenness) of wine and warns against such abuse,¹ the cautionary prohibition of alcohol² and the use of alcohol for enjoyment³.

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:12, 1 Corinthians 8:9-13, 1 Corinthians 10:23-31, Romans 14:19, Ephesians 5:18, 2 Peter 2:19

Alcohol, in and of itself, is not sinful, the misuse or abuse of alcohol creates the conditions ripe for sin. As an organization professing, teaching and outwardly striving to live the word of God, we have a responsibility to correctly lead people in the appropriate and responsible use of alcohol and to discourage and prohibit the misuse or abuse of alcohol. In 1 Corinthians 10:23 Paul states, "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. Paul continues to essentially describe a "law" which governs all Christian conduct which is the law of love – love toward God and toward one's brother (or sister). Practically, the believer follows this law with two considerations in mind. First, there is principle, by which anything which is expressly forbidden will be shunned by the Christian. Second, there is expediency, by which anything which is questionable, or may have an appearance of evil, or may cause a weaker brother (or sister) to stumble, will be avoided. In the latter case, a Christian often forgoes, out of love for God and his fellow believers, that which he does not think to be wrong in principle. This should be our approach to teaching and setting policies regarding the use of alcohol. Medicinal⁴ and celebratory⁵ uses of alcohol should be supported. Responsibility regarding the use of alcohol requires accountability, and all Christians must be willing to follow the teaching of Paul concerning the previously described law of love.

Teaching about the use of alcohol:

1. Moderation
2. Responsibility
3. Misuse/Abuse of alcohol
4. Paul's teaching

Alcohol use as sanctioned by the Journey:

1. Church hosted functions: No alcohol (to be expounded upon)
2. Non-church functions (i.e. weddings, family reunions, civic groups, etc.): Acceptable with rules to be established. This of course could change depending upon legal considerations.
3. All civil laws regarding the use of alcohol will be followed.

² Leviticus 10:9, Numbers 6:3, Judges 13: 4-14

³ Ecclesiastes 9:7, Psalm 104:14-15

⁴ 1 Timothy 5:23

⁵ John 2:1-11, Matthew 26:29