

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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The "Fear of the LORD" And the Use of Alcohol

By Rick Kenyon

In Proverbs, the phrase "fear of the Lord" occurs fourteen times in every major translation (1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17). In each reference the idea of respecting and revering God is always the emphasis. Thus, the "fear of the Lord" is a deep respect and reverence for God which leads one to obedience. One cannot properly respect God and not obey Him; a reverence for Him implies obedience. To provide a deeper understanding of the matter, six of the fourteen references explicitly state, "The fear of the LORD is..." The chart below summarizes these six verses with their significance.

It is evident that the one who fears the Lord also practices restraint. However, "practicing restraint" becomes a relative term with regards to the use of alcohol. "Practicing restraint" could mean consuming alcohol in moderation (so as to not get drunk), re-

fraining from consuming any alcohol, or consuming alcohol "responsibly" (so as not to endanger others when drunkenness ensues). Whatever one's view on the use of alcohol may be, one must retain the "fear of the LORD" when ascertaining what the Scriptures teach concerning the use alcohol.

By observing three passages in Proverbs that candidly mention the use of alcohol (20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4-7), one can gain wisdom by the "fear of the Lord."

Proverbs 20:1

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

First, history proves that "the unrestrained use of alcohol destroys families (cf. Noah [Gen. 9:20-29] and Ahasuerus [Est. 1:1-22]), leads to gross sexual

<i>The "Fear of the LORD" Is ...</i>	<i>Proverbs</i>	<i>Significance</i>
"... the beginning of knowledge."	1:7	The source of truth / understanding pertaining to life.
"... to hate evil."	8:13	Morality centers around God and that which is good.
"... the beginning of wisdom."	9:10	The source of all wisdom pertaining to life.
"... strong confidence."	14:26	Protection from sin, foolishness, and death.
"... a fountain of life."	14:27	A continuous and endless source of life.
"... the instruction of wisdom."	15:33	The only way by which true wisdom can be learned.

immorality (cf. Lot [Gen. 19:29-38]), and even top-ple kingdoms (cf. Belshazzar [Dan. 5])” (Vann 436). Alcohol continues to stand the test of time as a frequent and reliable source of ruin.

Second, renowned late seventeenth century commentator, Matthew Henry, noted the following concerning Proverbs 20:1,

When the wine is in the wit is out, and then the man, according as his natural temper is, either mocks like a fool or rages like a madman. Drunkenness, which pretends to be a sociable thing, renders men unfit for society, for it makes them abusive with their tongues and outrageous in their passions.

Third, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Those who believe that they can “hold their liquor” must not neglect that the “fear of the LORD” teaches that such a view is contrary to wisdom.

Proverbs 23:29-35

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? ³⁰They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. ³¹Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. ³²At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. ³³Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. ³⁴Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. ³⁵They

have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

Alcohol can lead one down a path which he or she never intended to go—much like the young simpleton of Proverbs 7:7-23 who was ensnared by the seductress. The

young man was merely “passing through the street near her corner” (Pr. 7:8), not intending to be seduced, but because his path “went the way to her house,” he became as an ox that “goeth to the slaughter.” Those who consume alcohol are in danger of a similar fate. The “fear of the LORD” teaches wisdom; and wisdom teaches that if one can avoid such a fate, one should. The one who never drinks can never suffer the bodily effects of alcohol.

Proverbs 31:4-7

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: ⁵Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. ⁶Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. ⁷Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

First, one should notice that there are specific cases where one should avoid alcohol (in every form). In general, here, the prohibition is for anyone who is in a position of leadership. Specific to this passage, “it is not for kings to drink wine” (kings are considered servants of God, Rom. 13:1). Levitical priests of the Old Testament were not permitted to “drink wine nor strong drink” (Lev. 10:8-11); likewise, the New Testament requires the same prohibition for elders (“not given to wine,” Tit. 1:7) and deacons (“not given to much wine,” 1 Tim. 3:8). Christians, in a sense, also fall into the category of leadership (cf. Rom. 12:2). Christians are both servants of God (Rom. 6:16-22), as well as priests (1 Pet. 2:9). If it is not for kings, it is certainly not for those who “fear the LORD.”

Second, the effects of drinking prevent sound judgment and discretion. To abstain from alcohol is not an arbitrary decree, but a practical one. Since Proverbs’ purpose is to impart wisdom by the “fear of the LORD,” it is only natural that one would follow the things that make and allow for wisdom. There is no verse in the Bible connecting the non-medicinal use of alcohol with godly wisdom. The Old Testament teaches one to “buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding” (Pr. 23:23). The New Testament teaches to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:12). Alcohol usage does not promote either case.

Third, there is a purpose and use for alcohol, namely to “him that is ready to perish” and “those that be of heavy hearts.” Does this divine justification support drinking for those who live hard lives?

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Hardly! This is a usage of alcohol as “medicinal purposes” (Rushmore 19). Alcohol has been medicinally used for centuries. Paul urged Timothy to “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities” (1 Tim. 5:23); and even today, many medicines contain alcohol used to treat various symptoms and ailments. However, this passage does not support those who wish to justify their habits of alcohol consumption based solely on “doctor’s orders.” While trace amounts may be used to treat some ailments, many other dangers are associated with alcohol: brain damage, heart damage, high blood pressure, liver damage, intestinal damage, etc. (Rushmore 27).

God’s sight. Merely mention the use of alcohol among brethren and observe the differing opinions. Many will point out, “That’s your interpretation.” However, the “fear of the LORD” recognizes only one Lord and one truth. Sadly, all cannot be won by truth and reason. To be pleasing in God’s sight, we must fear God (Eccl. 12:13-14). “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Pr. 4:7); but always remember, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...” (Pr. 9:10).

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Conclusion

If every Christian adopted the “fear of the LORD” attitude, then every Christian would be pleasing in

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