

Question: Since Jesus changed water to wine at a wedding feast (John 2:1-11), does this mean that he would approve of drinking alcoholic beverages?

While I have a strong inclination to answer with a simple and direct “No,” I have to admit that the answer to this question is not that easy. Let’s first examine the biblical evidence; then we can draw some conclusions.

Jesus well knew that throughout the Old Testament wine is both praised and condemned. At times it is an accepted part of life, a source of joy and a blessing (Ecclesiastes 10:19; Isaiah 55:1; Genesis 14:18; Judges 19:19; 1 Samuel 16:20). At other times wine and other strong drinks are spoken against (Proverbs 23:29-35; Isaiah 28:7-8). The wise man of the Proverbs said, “Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). The prophet Isaiah warned: “Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. . . Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks” (Isaiah 5:11 & 22).

Until well after New Testament times and the life of Jesus on earth, there was little water that was completely safe to drink. Methods for preventing fermentation were not well known. Thus, the apostle Paul warned, “Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses” (1 Timothy 5:23).

From the above, I conclude that under the circumstances in existence in the ancient world, wine taken in moderation was acceptable; but drunkenness was never acceptable (Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:21). However, conditions are very different in our modern world. We do not have the same problems with impure water and fermentation as the people of the ancient world did. We have safe and healthy alternative beverages for social events as well as home use that do not have the potential for intoxication or addiction. There is also a great difference between driving a donkey cart and driving a modern high-powered machine under the influence of alcohol. Thousands of lives are lost every year in America because of alcohol-related accidents on and off our highways.

I cannot say that Jesus would condemn drinking wine in moderation; but in view of the above evidence, I do believe he would discourage it in our modern world. After all, Jesus also taught his followers to be like salt that preserves the earth from the rottenness of decay, and he wanted them to be like a shining light on a hill leading others to glorify God (Matthew 5:13-16). We need to ask how does the use of alcoholic beverages in our world today bring glory to God? I don't think it does.

I pray that many will prayerfully consider what we have said here. I do not use alcoholic beverages socially or recreationally at any level, and I continue to discourage others from doing so. I believe that is what Jesus would do.

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