

How to Drink Like a Christian

An alcohol policy for the churches of St John's, Maroubra

Based on a sermon available at http://www.stjohnsmaroubra.com/bible_talks/how_to_drink/hospitality_part2.mp3

October 2011

1. Introduction

Christianity has a wonderful, raucous history punctuated by 2000 years of love feasts, a million meals of fellowship, and innumerable acts of hospitality. Romans 12:13 commands Christians to 'practice hospitality'. Galatians 5:21 warns against 'drunkenness'.

So what is a hospitable Australian meant to do? And what are we as a church going to do?

2. Theological Preamble: on freedom

a. Wine is good – so you are free

The first thing to say from God's word is that wine is good.¹ Psalm 104 hits the right note to represent the goodness of wine as a creation of God.

¹⁴ He makes grass grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to cultivate—
bringing forth food from the earth:
¹⁵ wine that gladdens human hearts,
oil to make their faces shine,
and bread that sustains their hearts.

The obvious result of this truth is that Christians are free to drink alcohol.

b. Drunkenness is not good – so stay free from sin

Of course, just as the bible is clear that wine is good, it is crystal clear that drunkenness is not good.² Drunkenness itself is bad, and the fruits of drunkenness are worse.

So...wine is good, so you are free to drink it. Drunkenness is sinful – so stay free of sin by not getting drunk.

c. The weak, the strong & mutual edification

Just as God lets us know wine is good and drunkenness is bad, he also knows we will have a disagreement about how then to use it, and in the pages of the New Testament answers the dilemma. Romans 14 is the chapter for anyone who wants to think *and* drink like a Christian.

The first thing to understand about Romans 14 is the categories 'strong' and 'weak'.¹

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant?

The point is this – God has given us real freedom in Christ. The only thing we cannot do is sin.

Usually the strong despise the weak and judge them to be conservative & over-cautious about sin, and the weak despise the strong and judge them to be too liberal and prone to sin.

But it is not to be so in Christ. Romans 14 again,

¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.

Instead of the strong being free, and the weak being restricted, the bible urges us to change the whole conversation. Instead of making the whole issue about whether Christians are free to drink or not, the issue is to be...love. It is to be love, which is why this is a matter of hospitality –the practice of love for others in need and especially the stranger.

So, the aim becomes not to drink or stop drinking, but to love the person I am with.

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking,
but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

¹ Gen 14:18; Gen 27:28; Num 15:5; Deut 14:26; Psalms 104:15; Prov 3:10; Ecclesiastes 9:7; 10:19; John 2:1-12; 1 Tim 5:23

² Gen 9:21; Gen 19:32; Prov 20:1; 21:17; 23:20; 23:29-31; Amos 6:6; Micah 2:11; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:8; 1 Tim 3:8; Titus 2:3

Christians do not exercise their rights. Rather, they enjoy their freedom under God, and either exercise freedom in thanksgiving under God, or occasionally restrain their freedom in order to serve their 'weaker' brothers and sisters.

¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

3. St John's Alcohol Policy

1. Using alcohol on our church site at church events

a. We say a general no to using alcohol on the church site. And the reason is when you have a *public* event with little control we'd love to be the one place that actually cares for people who have real struggles with alcohol. We must assume some people in a decent sized public crowd live with this struggle.

b. However, we don't want to create an inflexible rule, because that's not the scriptures. There may be an event at church in which the goodness of wine is sensible and reasonable. It may be that in order to win the lost to Jesus an event might be involved which would make no sense without wine, and so people doing ministry should be able to ask PC for approval for such an event.

The standard operation would be, on this matter, in this place we restrain our freedom. Or we seek an exception from Parish Council.

2. Concerning using alcohol off-site at church events (eg. a men's event at the Bowlo)

a. Exercise freedom, especially in a context where alcohol would be normally expected, but not normally abused.

In a culture where abuse of alcohol is seen as normal, you might have to look quite different, but we want to especially appreciate our freedom in an area where it allows us to open up to outsiders and meet with them in a way that might allow them to hear the gospel. And we appreciate the enjoyment of God's good creation!

b. However, seek to understand the impact and restrain freedom if you know that your exercise of it will bring problems to others. Why not have a dry table? Or even have a few people take a weaker brother/sister out to a seriously great dinner at the time of the event?

3. Concerning using alcohol off-site at events involving church people, but not officially a church event. (eg. your 21st)

This is not really our jurisdiction – we urge all to simply think like a Christian, & drink like a Christian.

Questions for small group discussion

1. I hear your point, and understand the principles, but if I am having people over from church and know someone struggles with drunkenness, what do I do?

2. Say I have decided to have no alcohol at lunch, but a guest brings a bottle. Isn't it rude not to serve it?

3. You just can't expect to have any credibility in our society if you don't serve alcohol. It becomes a stumbling block with outsiders.

4. I want to have a 40th at the church hall and invite some non-Christian mates. Alcohol is obvious for me at this. What should I do?