

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Personal Conviction: A Biblical Perspective

Josh Spurlock

The use of alcohol and tobacco has long been a point of contention among Christians. Often, these substances are denounced as immoral, based on a few specific scriptures. However, a closer examination of the Bible shows that the use of alcohol and tobacco is largely a matter of personal conviction, and not a clear-cut moral imperative. In essence, it's not the substances themselves but how they are used and the role they play in one's life that gives them moral significance.

Biblical Context on Alcohol

The Bible never categorically condemns the consumption of alcohol. In fact, wine is mentioned frequently in a positive light. Psalm 104:14-15 says, "He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth, And wine which makes man's heart glad." Wine was used in Jewish customs, festivals, and even in their daily lives. Jesus himself turned water into wine during the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), and Paul advised Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake (1 Timothy 5:23).

The Bible does, however, warn against drunkenness. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery." Proverbs 20:1 warns, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." These passages do not argue against the consumption of alcohol but against its misuse. The emphasis is on moderation and self-control.

Contextualizing 1 Corinthians 6:19

Many have quoted 1 Corinthians 6:19 as a sweeping statement about our physical health, diet, and other related aspects. However, when we delve deeper into the context, Paul's admonishment in 1 Corinthians 6:19 is in response to the issue of joining oneself with a

temple prostitute, as made evident in 1 Corinthians 6:18 which states, "Flee from sexual immorality." Thus, the phrase "your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit" is referring to the profound spiritual union and implications of our physical actions, especially in the context of sexual morality. To stretch this verse to directly address tobacco, diet, or exercise would be an overextension of its intended message.

The Stance of Charles Spurgeon

Charles Spurgeon, one of the most revered Baptist preachers of the 19th century, was known to use tobacco. He is often quoted as saying, when criticized for his use, "If I find excessive smoking to be an enslavement, I will cut it loose." Spurgeon's stance echoes the Biblical perspective on personal conviction. While he found no moral imperative against tobacco, he did recognize the importance of not being mastered by anything, a principle that aligns with 1 Corinthians 6:12.

Personal Conviction and Freedom

Romans 14 speaks about the issue of disputable matters among believers. Paul writes, "One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him." (Romans 14:2-3). The principle here is that in areas where Scripture is silent or where there are gray areas, believers are to be guided by their personal convictions and not to judge others based on those convictions.

The Impact on Others

While we have freedom, the Bible also teaches that we should be careful that our freedom does not become a stumbling block for others. "It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble" (Romans 14:21). If our use of alcohol or tobacco causes another believer to be tempted or to stumble in their faith, then out of love we should abstain.

Conclusion

The Bible offers wisdom for every aspect of our lives, yet it is crucial to understand scriptures in their intended context. While there's no direct command against the consumption of alcohol or tobacco, the essence of Biblical teaching leans towards personal conviction, moderation, and the broader implications of our actions on others. As believers, the challenge is to navigate these freedoms with wisdom, love, and an understanding that our choices should always reflect the higher principles of faith and love for our neighbors.