

“Austin Congregation Raises A Toast To God”

A few weeks ago, the Lufkin Daily News ran an AP article with the aforementioned title detailing the worship of the All Saints Episcopal Church at Opal Divine’s, a pub in South Austin. Steve Kinney, the priest at All Saints, has held monthly meetings — typically the third Sunday of each month — of what some followers informally call “pub church”. The article states that “these sorts of gatherings — explorations of craft beer, spirituality, ideas, and community where all are welcome — are popping up in numbers cities around the country.” Kinney said, “It’s a crowd-pleaser. You come at 5:30 and have a cold beer and good music and you order dinner. There’s a lot of similarities between the Eucharist and a good bartender.” Chris Parson, a civil attorney, says he attends to keep his mind open, to combat the idea that people are too “rigid” in their faith.

If you are trying to decide which problem society has the most trouble facing, chances are social drinking will not cross your mind. But we must deal with social drinking because, as the above referenced article proves, it has an impact on society and is even being promoted as a viable religious experience.

The Bible gives incontrovertible evidence that drunkenness is sinful (Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:18; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:7-8). However, it is more difficult to convince someone that social drinking is sinful. This is primarily because millions of people see social drinking as acceptable, as long as it is not combined with blatant negligence, i.e., drunk driving.

By “social drinking,” I do not mean someone who habitually gets drunk. There are those who occasionally drink beer, wine, whiskey, vodka, etc., after work, with dinner, or apparently in a “worship assembly” without getting near the legal definition of “drunk.” Even though this does not appear to contradict biblical teaching, you will see that the Bible does indicate that it is wrong.

In defending the action of taking a drink or two occasionally, many people argue, “Didn’t Jesus make wine and didn’t He drink at social functions?” This is a bastion of defense for alcoholic beverages by drinkers, whether Christian or not. Even after seeing all the problems alcohol can cause, the “social drinker” will quip, “the Bible condemns drunkenness, but it does not condemn social drinking.” Sadly, if one searches several Bible dictionaries and commentaries, they will find religious scholars on the side of being

against drunkenness, but for social drinking. But the question with which we must concern ourselves is "What does the Bible say?"

People who seek to justify social drinking because the Bible does not specifically condemn it are mistaken for a couple of reasons. First, the word for "*banquetings*" in 1 Peter 4:3 is the Greek word *potos* which was the ancient practice of social drinking. R. C. Trench states that this word means "the drinking bout, the banquet, the symposium, not of necessity excessive (Genesis 19:3; 2 Samuel 3:20; Esther 6:14), but giving opportunity for excess (1 Samuel 25:36)." Peter made a specific reference to drunkenness and drinking parties, condemning them both! Second, the irony of the mockers' charge that on Pentecost the apostles were drunk on *gleukos*, that is, on the grape juice that apparently was their common beverage (Acts 2:13), provides an indirect proof of their abstinence from fermented grape juice. There would have been no point in' attributing the cause of the disciples' strange actions to unfermented grape juice if it was not common knowledge that the apostles abstained from intoxicating wine. The intended jibe was that the disciples were such dimwits they got drunk on grape juice!

In the New Testament, purity has always been a major aspect of a Christian's life (1 Timothy 4:12; 5:22; 2 Timothy 2:22; Romans 12:1). Do you really believe a loose attitude concerning social drinking would meet God's requirements for purity? Furthermore, consider two statements in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus not only condemned murder but He went beyond the overt crime of killing and stated that anyone who has a malicious and wicked attitude is a murderer. Also, in Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus not only condemned adultery but He went to the heart of the problem and stated that someone commits adultery even if they look at a woman and lust after her. Considering the way Jesus taught on these two subjects, what do you think He would teach about social drinking?

In Philippians 2:5, Paul said, "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*" Specifically, Paul was writing about humility but the principle can apply to all phases of being a Christian. I need to diligently have the same attitude Jesus did toward all subjects. A very appropriate question is, "Could you see Jesus engaging in social or occasional drinking at a 'pub church'?"

Kyle Campbell