



WINE

Does The Bible Condone The “Social”
Or “Recreational” Use Of Alcohol?



BY JARROD M. JACOBS

Wine

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV).

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What Some Are Saying About This Book ...

FROM TEXAS ...

- “A well written and concise work exposing a very dangerous and destructive plague on humanity.”
- “Brother Jacobs has done an excellent job in taking a controversial subject and condensing it to its basic points. The arguments for social and/or recreational drinking cannot stand.”

FROM KENTUCKY ...

- “I highly recommend this study and wish for it a wide circulation.”
- “Thank you for this simple and scriptural study of the dangers of drinking intoxicating wines. I hope it will be widely read, especially by young people who need to avoid steadfastly the Serpent’s elixir.... Young people need to pledge to God and to themselves to abstain from every form of evil including intoxicating drinks. Let everyone who stumbles and sins turn to Christ who washes away our sins in his blood (Acts 22:16; 1 John 1:9).”

FROM TENNESSEE ...

- “Brother Jacobs has produced an easily understood essay against the dangers of drinking alcoholic beverages. With his constant appeal to the Scriptures, he destroys the arguments of those who contend for their use as being right in the sight of God.”

FROM INDIANA ...

- “I appreciate your efforts. I have the paperback book on wine that brethren have used for years. Yours is a good addition to that.”
- “How sad that some claiming to be Christians see no problem with the consumption of intoxicants! Jarrod sets the record straight with an honest and accurate handling of God’s word on the subject.”
- “If there is one story people are familiar with from the Bible it is how Jesus turned water into wine. Many will use this event as a platform to interpret the Bible to promote the recreational use of alcohol and drugs. They fail to realize that the same book strongly urges us to avoid alcoholic drink and to not even be enticed by it (Prov. 23:31-32). Brother Jacobs has done a masterful job at examining many of the Bible texts that discuss wine and shows how they harmonize with one another. And he does this using plain and understandable language – with just enough detail to not get lost in excessive information. This is a must-have for those who want a better understanding of the history and use of wine in the Bible.”

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Author's note:

The drinking of alcohol on “social” occasions is a continual subject of controversy among Christians. Is it okay to drink alcohol so long as one promises not to get drunk? Did God give His blessing to those who wanted to drink only “a little wine”? Did the people in Bible days know how to keep fresh grape juice unfermented since they had no means of refrigeration to preserve juice as we do? Did they have to ferment their juice in order to preserve it for long periods of time? These and many other questions will be answered in the following pages.

This handbook is the product of studies done during a time in which certain citizens in the county where I live wished to legalize alcohol sales. This study focuses on the major arguments people use to justify drinking (and selling) alcohol. I hope that this work will help you in your study of God's word on the subject.

This is intended to be a reference book. You are encouraged to read this book through, but *it is not necessary*. Feel free to read “here and there” as your study warrants. Read the last chapter first, and the first last! The intention is for this book to help you in your personal study, as well your study with others who have questions about what the Bible says about the “social” or “recreational” drinking of wine and other alcoholic products. Please use this booklet with Bible in hand. You will need it! Though I quoted many Bible verses in this work, there are many other verses that are only cited. Therefore, please be an active reader and make sure that I have used God's word correctly (Acts 17:11).

May God bless you in your study!

- Jarrod M. Jacobs

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Introduction

Our society wants us to drink. We are encouraged to drink alcohol at parties, after work, when frustrated, when introspective, at meals, etc. We are told that consuming alcohol provides “fun.” We are told that alcohol is needed for “sophisticated” parties, for barbecues, ball games, and everything in-between. In many social circles, drinking alcohol is the “norm.”

Yet, when we read the Scriptures, God says something completely different (Prov. 20:1, 23:29-35; I Pet. 4:3). Thus, we are faced with a choice that men have faced for millennia. Specifically, do we follow the traditions of men or the doctrine of God (Matt. 15:8-9; Lk. 20:4; Acts 4:18-20)? If Christians are to be faithful to God, then we need to act in the manner God wants us to act (Col. 3:17; I Pet. 2:21-22; etc.).

The consumption of alcohol has become so integrated into society that we find Christians who justify drinking it. They will offer prooftexts in the Scriptures that *seem* to say that God condones recreational or social drinking. We are told that we can drink, as long as we promise not to get drunk! Is this what the Bible says? In the following pages, we will examine men’s justification of drinking alcohol and see what the Bible teaches on this subject.

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I.

Does The Term “Wine” In The Bible Mean Alcoholic Wine?

The short answer to this question is both “Yes” and “No”! The reason why the question can be answered with “yes” and “no” is because the term “wine”¹ is a generic term. In the Bible, wine denotes “the juice of the grape” in all forms. This means it could refer to a fermented or an unfermented drink. Therefore, the context of the Bible passage where the word “wine” is used will give us the best insight into how God intends for this word to be used.

Reading the word “wine” in the Bible is akin to reading such generic terms as “groceries,” “automobile,” “furniture,” or “music” in 21st-century literature. These generic terms alone do not tell us the type, kind, or categories of the groceries, automobiles, furniture, or music in question. This will not be known until we understand the context in which the words were used.

For example, when someone speaks of getting “groceries,” what does this mean? Can we assume “groceries” means bread, eggs, and milk? What about sugar, flour, and salt? What else might we categorize as “groceries”? My wife puts soap on

¹ “Yayin” in Hebrew and “Oinos” in Greek

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the “grocery” list. I know someone who went grocery shopping and in addition to food, bought batteries, pens, paper, and glue! Yet, the person said he was “grocery” shopping! Why use this term? It is because it is a generic term covering many items, not one specific item. Thus, when someone goes “grocery” shopping, we will not know what was bought until we ask the person some specific questions.

Furthermore, what brands of vehicles might fit in the category of “automobile”? Is it exclusively Fords and Chevys? Is it exclusively cars? No, we recognize the word “automobile” is a general term that covers a wide range of motorized transportation that could be sold by a wide range of automakers, retailers, and individuals. When someone refers to an “automobile” that is for sale, we have to ask, “what kind of automobile do you mean?” We know nothing about the size, color, make, model, etc., when one uses the general term “automobile.”

What about the term “furniture”? Does “furniture” mean a chair or a couch? Is furniture exclusively something on which one sits? In by-gone days, I remember folks speaking of their television sets as “furniture”! Can you remember back that far? One person talked to me about moving some “furniture”, and he was referring to his bookshelf!

When thinking about music, sometimes, we hear people complain, “What kids are listening to today is not music!” Again, the word “music” is a broad, general term. “Music” can be vocal, instrumental, or a combination of both. It is heard when someone beats on a can in a rhythmic way, just as it is heard when a great symphony performs or a great singer sings. If someone asks a question concerning music, we will not get very far in the conversation until it is ascertained the “kind” of music in question.

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Thus, if we wish to know what kind of “groceries,” “automobiles,” “furniture,” and “music” is under consideration in someone’s conversation, we must listen and respect the context in which the words are used.

It is the same with the word “wine” in the Bible. Refusing to respect the context in which the word is used has resulted in confusion about wine. Our society almost exclusively equates the term “wine” with an alcoholic drink. Thus, when reading the word “wine” in the Bible, many will assume this is alcohol because they think of it in no other way. Put simply, our society has made the term “wine” a specific term in conversation when God uses it in a general sense in Scripture. No wonder people are confused about this subject!

Since the word “wine” in Scripture is a generic term, we must respect the context of the Scripture to know whether or not the “wine” mentioned is fermented or unfermented. A careful study of the Scriptures will reveal what God had in mind in a particular passage.

For example, the Bible speaks of “*new wine*” on several occasions (Neh. 10:39, 13:5; Prov. 3:10; Isa. 65:8; Joel 1:10; Lk. 5:37-38; Acts 2:13). As a rule, “new wine” would be akin to our term “grape juice.” It is the juice that has just been squeezed. At the cross, Jesus was offered “*vinegar/sour wine*” (Matt. 27:48; Jn. 19:29-30). Isaiah 27:2 speaks of “*red wine*”. Three times, the Bible talks about “*sweet wine*” (Isa. 49:26; Amos 9:13; Micah 6:15). In the book of Nehemiah, we read the people had “*all sorts of wine*” (Neh. 5:18). These passages all have contexts which must be respected. We cannot assume each passage is speaking of alcohol simply because we read the word “wine”.

In addition to this, we read where wine was mixed with a variety of other substances. Often, this was done to increase its potency. At the cross, Christ refused the wine that was mixed

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with myrrh or gall (Matt. 27:34; Mk. 15:23). This mixture served as a type of pain-killer, and Jesus would not drink. In the Song of Solomon, he refers to wine being mixed with milk and mixed with spices (Song of Sol. 5:1, 8:2). Proverbs 23:30 also refers to “mixed wine.”

Based on what we have studied, we can now understand why the word “wine” in Isaiah 65:8 does not refer to the same thing as the word “wine” in Proverbs 20:1. “Wine” is a generic term. Therefore, it is not contradictory that the Bible speaks about “wine” as a blessing (Gen. 27:28; Deut. 14:26; Ecc. 9:7; Song of Sol. 5:1, 8:2; Isa. 65:8) and at the same time pronounces “woe” on others for drinking wine in Isaiah 5:11, 22, and other similar passages. It is a mistake to assume that the word “wine” refers to an alcoholic drink unless the context of the passage shows us that it does.

2.

Comparing Apples To Apples
(Are Those Who Justify Social Drinking
Actually Drinking “Wine” Or “Strong
Drink”?)

This chapter is devoted to making sure that we compare like things in our study on consuming alcoholic drinks. For lack of a better term, I call it comparing apples to apples because there are times when men read the Bible and mistakenly put a 21st-century definition on an ancient word.

“Doesn’t ‘wine’ mean ‘wine’? Don’t we make the same wine as people made in Bible days?” someone may ask. We have already noted in the first chapter that the Bible term for wine² is a generic term and thus we need to read the word in its context in order to know whether or not the wine in the passage is fermented. Secondly, we need to understand that the alcoholic wine from Bible days differs from the alcoholic wine someone might buy at a store or restaurant today.

Those who have studied the Middle Eastern culture of the Old and New Testaments tell us that the alcohol produced in those days does not compare with the alcoholic drinks

² “Yayin” in Hebrew and “Oinos” in Greek

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produced and sold in our stores and restaurants today. R. Laird Harris writes, “Concentrated alcohol was only known in the Middle Ages when the Arabs invented distillation (‘alcohol’ is an Arabic word) so what is now called liquor or strong drink (i.e. whiskey, gin, etc.) and the twenty percent fortified wines were unknown in Bible times”.³ Joseph P. Free said, “Wine and beer in ancient Palestine contained not over five or eight percent alcohol”.⁴ Contrast these statements about alcohol in Bible days with the fact that brandy, rum, whiskey, and gin marketed today contain 50% or more alcohol. Most wines today have an alcohol content of 20%. In other words, according to the experts, the alcohol being made and sold today does not compare with the wine that was made in Bible days. No, we are not comparing “apples to apples” when we refer to the wines of today with the wine of Bible times. The wine of long ago had much less alcohol content than what is manufactured and sold in stores today.

In contrast with the 5% to 8% alcohol content in the wine of Bible days, alcoholic drinks today can begin at 5%, and increase from there! In general, where the alcohol content in wine ended in Bible days is where the alcohol content in wine and other drinks begins today! Add to this the fact that in Bible times those who drank wine would universally mix water with it and bring the overall alcohol content of the drink down even lower.⁵ Based on these facts, we can see that almost any modern-day alcoholic drink cannot be compared to the fermented wine in Bible times.

³ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 376

⁴ *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 352

⁵ For a more detailed study, see page 38.

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Alcoholic Content In Most Modern-Day Wines

Wine Coolers	4-7%
Table Wine general	8-14%
White, dry	11.0
White, sparkling	12.0
White, sweet	12.4
Cabernet, Pinot Noir	11-14%
Dessert Wine	14-20%
Zinfandels	17-22%
Vermouth	17-22%
Port Wine	20%

Sources: <http://www.eciconference.com/resources/2015---Social-Drinking/02PopeMeaningofWine.pdf>
and
<http://www.alcoholcontents.com/wine/>

Not only does the Bible speak about “wine,” but it also speaks of “strong drink”. The term “strong drink” comes from the Hebrew word “shekar” (or “shechar”). Wayne Jackson suggests that shekar is a general term just as yayin is. Shekar (strong drink) refers to sweet syrups from dates or palms and other non-grape products. It would also refer to the intoxicating beverages made by the dates or palms.⁶ Therefore, like the term “yayin” (wine) we need to know the Biblical context of “shekar” in order to determine whether or not it means an intoxicating drink. Frederick Lees makes a

⁶ “*What About Social Drinking and the Old Testament?*”

<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/220-what-about-social-drinking-and-the-old-testament>

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similar point in his *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*.⁷

Evidently, there are other scholars who think the Biblical context of shekar overwhelmingly refers to an intoxicating drink. I say this because reference books like *Strong's Hebrew/Greek Dictionary* define “strong drink” (shekar) only as, “an intoxicant, that is, intensely alcoholic liquor” (*Strong's*). *Brown, Driver, and Briggs* says shekar is, “strong drink, intoxicating drink, fermented or intoxicating liquor.” Commentator Albert Barnes says, “The strong drink among the Jews was probably nothing more than a drink obtained from fermented figs, dates, and the juices of the palm, or the lees of the wine mingled with sugar, and having the power to produce intoxication.” Therefore, let us not confuse the terms “wine” and “strong drink” as we read the Scriptures. It is obvious that God considers wine and strong drink distinct from one another. At the same time, when God speaks of “strong drink” He speaks almost exclusively of an intoxicating beverage. Please read the following passages:

- “Do not **drink wine nor strong drink**, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations” (Lev. 10:9).
- “And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk **neither wine nor strong drink**, but have poured out my soul before the LORD” (I Sam. 1:15).
- “**Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise**” (Prov. 20:1)
- “For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and

⁷ Lees, Frederick, Ph.D., *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, John Kitto, Ed., 1880, I, p. 585

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shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb” (Lk. 1:15).

In addition to these passages, we could include Numbers 6:3; Judges 13:4-7; Proverbs 31:4; Isaiah 5:11, 22; etc., in our study. It is clear that “strong drink” is condemned throughout the Bible.

Yes, God made a distinction between “wine” and “strong drink” in the Scripture. In addition to this, since we know that those in Bible days could not have produced what we call “hard liquor,” because distillation was unknown in those days, if we compare “apples to apples”, we will see that almost every alcoholic drink for sale in restaurants or stores today (including wine) is more potent than the wine that was made in Bible days. Therefore, the wine men drink today does not compare with the wine of the Bible. Wine and other alcoholic drinks sold today are things the Bible condemns! Are we in favor of partaking in something God that condemns? I pray not!

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3.

Could Ancient People Store Unfermented Grape Juice?

Some have denied that ancient people had the ability to preserve and store unfermented grape juice since they had no refrigeration in those days. The claim is that they *had* to ferment the harvested juice so it would not ruin. This claim is false. The truth is that people *could* store unfermented grape juice. In fact, the people in Bible days had at least four options to prevent grape juice from fermenting. These options were:

- **Filtration:** This process involves pouring grape juice through a filter to capture the gluten (yeast) that occurs naturally in grapes. Fermentation cannot happen without gluten present in the juice. Filtration was described in Isaiah 25:6 in the KJV as “wine on the lees”. Keil and Delitzsch’s commentary of Isaiah says this means the juice was filtered. The Lexham English Bible uses the term “filtered” in the passage.

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- **Subsidence:** The ancient people discovered that gluten is heavier than the water (juice) of the grape. To prevent fermentation, some would store their juice in a cold/cool environment such as a “root cellar”, or in a pond, well, cave, etc. When stored in cooler temperatures, the gluten will settle to the bottom of the container and thus prevent fermentation.
- **Fumigation:** This is accomplished by adding sulfur to the juice. The sulfur will absorb the oxygen present in the juice and prevent fermentation. In Bible days, people would infuse sulfur by adding an egg yolk to freshly-pressed juice. The sulfur in the egg yolk was sufficient to prevent fermentation or stop fermentation if it had already begun.
- **Boiling:** Those living in Bible days would often boil grape juice. This would leave a thick syrup (“Chemer” or “Chemar”, like a concentrate). Then, when people wanted to drink the juice, they would simply add water to this syrup. If it was reduced far enough, this syrup would have been used as we use maple syrup or sorghum today. This concentrate would keep for a long time and did not ferment. The Mishna (oral tradition of the Jews) says the Jews were in the habit of boiling juice.

Thus, there were four options available to people in Bible days to keep their fresh grape juice from fermenting without refrigeration. The people did not have to make alcoholic wine in order to preserve or store juice.

In spite of the historical record, some have questioned the effectiveness of the above methods. Some have even denied

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that ancient people actually preserved grape juice in these ways. To test to see whether or not these methods were effective, in 2010, Kyle Pope of Amarillo, TX, squeezed 11 ½ pounds of black grapes and employed the boiling and filtering methods described above in order to preserve fresh grape juice. He tested these methods under the supervision of Dr. Pat Goguen, who holds a Ph.D. in Chemistry. He then charted his results. After employing the methods we have described above, the result was that 0% alcohol content was found in the boiled and filtered juice. The chart he made that recorded his results is below.

Condition	Unfiltered		Filtered	Filtered & Boiled	Filtered, Boiled, & Reduced 1/3	Filtered, Boiled, & Reduced 1/5	Filtered, Boiled, & Reduced 1/10
	Date Sealed	5/5/2010		5/3/2010	5/4/2010	5/3/2010	5/4/2010
Date Opened	WT Test 3/25/2011	1/3/ 2012	1/3/2012	1/5/2012	1/5/2012	1/7/2012	1/7/2012
Alcohol Content	12 -6%	6.6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: <http://www.eciconference.com/resources/2015---Social-Drinking/03PopeProcessofPreservingGrapeJuice.pdf>

These four methods the ancient people used showed that they knew what was necessary for grape juice to become fermented. They also knew what was necessary to impede fermentation. Please understand that grape juice doesn't become alcoholic wine merely by waiting. There is a reason why those who produce wine are called *winemakers*! They must employ specific methods to produce the wine they desire. Since there is a process by which juice becomes wine, if this process is interrupted or some aspect is impeded, then there will be no alcohol produced.

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For example, in order to produce a fermented/alcoholic drink from grapes, the following must be true:

- One must have saccharine (i.e., sugar) and gluten (i.e., yeast) present in the juice. The quantity of both must be carefully regulated because too much or too little will impede and even prevent fermentation. Yet, in a process like “filtration” when one removes the gluten, fermentation is impossible.
- One must keep the temperature of the juice above 50 degrees (F) and below 75 degrees (F). If the temperature of the juice is too cold or too hot, it will impede or prevent fermentation. Therefore, by storing the juice in a cool place like a well or cave, etc., the ancient people knew that fermentation could not happen.
- One must make sure the juice is a certain consistency. A thick syrup will not ferment! Therefore, by boiling the juice, the ancient people would impede the fermentation process. As we noted earlier, boiling was a common method the Jews used for storing unfermented grape juice.

In other words, those in Bible days were able to store unfermented juice. They did not have to ferment it into alcohol in order to preserve it. Knowing how ancient people preserved grape juice is more evidence to show that we cannot assume that the word “wine” in the Bible means alcohol in every instance. We must look into the context of the passage to determine whether or not the term wine means a fermented or unfermented drink. Let us respect this truth.

4.

Seven Passages Which Declare
God's Thoughts About The
"Social/Recreational" Use Of
Alcohol.

What has God said about the "social" or "recreational" drinking of alcohol? Let us read seven passages in the Bible that talk about consuming alcohol and see what God has revealed on the subject.

Proverbs 20:1

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

Proverbs 23:29-35

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who

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hath redness of eyes? They that **tarry long at the wine**; they that go to seek **mixed wine**. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, 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. They 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.”

Proverbs 31:4-5

“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings **to drink wine**; nor for princes **strong drink**: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.”

I Corinthians 6:9-11

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, **nor drunkards**, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

Galatians 5:19-21

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, **drunkenness**, **revellings**, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I

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have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Ephesians 5:18

“And **be not drunk with wine**, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit”

I Peter 4:3-4

“For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, **excess of wine, revellings, banquetings**, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you”

All of these passages are very straightforward concerning what God thinks about alcoholic drinks. As we read these passages, we see that God has condemned drinking alcohol in every degree or aspect. For example, in Ephesians 5:18, Paul wrote, “*be not drunk with wine ...*”. In this verse, the English word “drunk” is translated from the Greek word “methusko”. Methusko refers to the process of getting drunk. It means, “to become drunk or become intoxicated” (*Thayer*). In this passage, Paul is literally telling Christians *not to begin the process* of becoming drunk. Since Paul wrote “*the commandments of the Lord*” (I Cor. 14:37), we can know that God does not want us to drink at all. After all, how does one “begin the process” of becoming drunk without a drink?

Another time we see God condemning the drinking of alcohol is in I Peter 4:3-4. The passage says that God condemns “excess of wine,” “revellings,” and “banquetings” in which men may be engaged. What do these words mean?

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- “Excess of wine”⁸ literally means an “overflow or surplus of wine ... drunkenness” (*Strong’s*). It refers to the habitual drunk, the wino, etc., the one who drinks and passes out unconscious. The alcoholic who goes on “binges” and the like.
- “Revellings”⁹ means a “letting loose” or a carousal (*Strong’s*). The person guilty of “reveling” is one who drinks alcohol and has lost his inhibitions. This is the person folks call “lit” or “buzzed.” A person in this state might be referred to as “Ten feet tall and bulletproof.” This action is condemned in Galatians 5:19-21 just as it is in I Peter 4:3.
- “Banquetings”¹⁰ means a drinking, drinking bout, or an assembling together for the purpose of drinking (*Strong’s*). In modern terminology, we might refer to this as the times when folks are invited for cocktails or the social drinking that is encouraged at weddings, “wine tastings,” times when folks have a beer after work, etc.

We are not to be engaged in the recreational use of alcohol. God condemns it in the Old and New Testaments. Sadly, there are people, including some Christians, who deny plain statements of Scripture like we have read and will attempt to justify social drinking with certain Scriptures. What kind of arguments do men make? We will study those in the following chapters.

⁸ Greek: oinophlugia

⁹ Greek: komos

¹⁰ Greek: potos

5.

Arguments Men Use To Prove
We Can Drink Alcohol
“Socially.”

“Jesus Turned Water Into Wine.”

The proof many offer for justifying social drinking is the record of Christ’s first miracle (Jn. 2:1-11). Many say Jesus made alcoholic wine at the wedding in Cana because the governor of the feast¹¹ said after tasting Jesus’ wine that they had saved the “*good wine*” until last (Jn. 2:10).

Let me begin by saying that those who suggest that the man’s statement about “*good wine*” means it had a strong alcohol content are actually confessing **their** preference rather than teaching what the Bible says!

The word “good” in this text comes from the Greek word “kalon”. It means, “excellent in nature and characteristics ...

¹¹ Other versions call him “the man in charge,” “head steward,” “master,” “butler,” or “chief attendant”.

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superior” (*Thayer*). Another definition of “good” is: “beautiful ... valuable, virtuous, better, fair ... honest, well, worthy” (*Strong’s*). Notice that this word is **never** used in the Bible to describe the potency of alcohol or any other drug! Pliny, who lived contemporary with Christ and the apostles, said that good wine was that which had its strength “broken by the filter.”¹² While he is not an inspired person, notice that what he said was considered “good wine” in those days had nothing to do with the alcohol content. In fact, the lack of alcohol was called “good.” Therefore, even if it could be proven conclusively that Christ had made alcoholic wine, the ruler would not have used the term “good” to describe the potency of any alcohol that might have been present.¹³

Sometimes, it is argued that the people at the wedding were drinking alcohol because the text says that these folks had “*well drunk*.” From this phrase, some assume that the guests had been drinking alcohol already (v. 10). This is a wrong assumption because “*well drunk*” refers to the amount consumed, **not** the state of inebriation! Below are five other parallel Bible versions that show that the man was referring to the amount consumed and not the state of inebriation. He said,

- “When all have had enough” (BBE).
- “After the guests have had plenty” (CEV).
- “After the guests have drunk a lot” (GNB).
- “When they are well satisfied” (JUB).
- “When men have drunk well” (MKJV).

None of these versions even hint at the idea that folks were drunk already!

¹² For an explanation of “filtration,” see p. 22

¹³ For more study on this phrase “good wine” and the miracle recorded in John 2, please read the Appendix on page 58.

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To better understand what had happened in this miracle, let us examine the context of John 2:1-11. As we analyze the context of John 2, we find that Jesus was told that the wine (“oinos”) had been consumed (v. 3). In response, Jesus commanded the servants to bring Him six waterpots, each with the ability to hold 20-30 gallons (v. 6). Jesus told them to fill the pots with water, and they were filled to the brim (v. 7). This means there was between 120-180 gallons of water before the Lord. This water was then turned into wine (v. 9). Based on what we have studied about the word “wine”, why would we assume Jesus was making alcohol? Is it not because of our 21st-century assumptions rather than respecting the context of the book of John?

For argument’s sake, let us assume that Jesus made alcohol as His first miracle. If John 2 is describing Jesus performing a miracle to make alcohol for the people, then Jesus was attending a drunken feast, and now has provided between 120-180 *additional* gallons of alcohol for these drunk people to continue consuming! If Jesus was making alcohol, and making it in such large quantities, then let us ask a few questions.

- Does this sound like something the Son of God, who did no sin, would be doing (I Pet. 2:22)?
- If Jesus was making over one hundred gallons of alcohol, does this sound like a place Jesus would want to bring His mother and disciples (Jn. 2:1-2)?
- Would the sinless Savior be involved in breaking one of God’s commands concerning drunkenness by making *more* alcohol (Hab. 2:15)?
- Would Jesus be involved in making something that God calls a “*mock*er” (Prov. 20:1)?

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- Does it make sense that Jesus would be involved in doing one thing and then inspiring His apostles to write something else to future Christians (Eph. 5:18; I Pet. 4:3-4; etc.)?

Who can believe that Jesus would perform a miracle which would itself result in His sinning and disqualifying Himself from being our Savior (I Pet. 2:21-22)? How some can take a miracle that was used by Christ to show His deity (Jn. 2:11) and turn it into a justification for social drinking, I'll never know!

Rather than assuming Christ made alcohol because we read the word "wine" in John 2, let us respect the context, and also consider who Jesus is.

“Deacons Can Drink A ‘Little’ Wine. Social Drinking Is Acceptable For A Deacon, But Not For An Elder.”

This is a misunderstanding of I Timothy 3:8. The KJV says deacons must not be “*given to much wine.*” After reading this passage, some have tried to distinguish between “much” and “little” in the text. This is not good Bible exegesis. When we study this text, we find that God is saying not to be *addicted* to much wine. This was the point. In ten other Bible translations, the true emphasis of this verse is seen:

I Timothy 3:8

- **English Standard Version** – “Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, *not addicted to much wine*, not greedy for dishonest gain.”
- **God’s Word** – “Deacons must also be of good character. They must not be two-faced or *addicted to*

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alcohol. They must not use shameful ways to make money.”

- **International Standard Version** – “Ministers, too, must be serious. They must not be two-faced, *addicted to wine*, or greedy for money.”
- **Literal Translation Version** – “Likewise, deacons are to be reverent, not double-tongued, *not addicted to much wine*, not greedy of ill gain”
- **James Murdock Translation of the Bible** – “And so also the deacons should be pure, and not speak double, nor *incline to much wine*, nor love base gains”
- **New American Standard** – “Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or *addicted to much wine* or fond of sordid gain”
- **Revised Standard Version** – “Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, *not addicted to much wine*, not greedy for gain”
- **Tree of Life Version** – “Servant-leaders likewise must be dignified, not double-speaking, *not addicted to much wine*, not greedy for dishonest gain.”
- **Weymouth New Testament** – “Deacons, in the same way, must be men of serious demeanour, not double-tongued, *nor addicted to much wine*, nor greedy of base gain”
- **World English Bible** – “Servants, in the same way, must be reverent, not double-tongued, *not addicted to much wine*, not greedy for money”

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This is why we noted above that distinguishing between “much” wine and “little” wine is not the point in the text. When we realize that God doesn’t want deacons *addicted* to much wine, can they be addicted to a “little wine” and be okay? Obviously not! God doesn’t want elders of the church drinking wine (I Tim. 3:3) and He doesn’t want deacons of the church addicted to wine! These are simply two different ways of saying the same thing. Please note that the same wording is used in Titus 2:3 concerning older women. The point is that God does not want men or women drinking alcoholic drinks! I Timothy 3:8 does **not** justify deacons drinking a “little” alcohol!

“Timothy Was Told To Drink Wine”

This is a true statement. Paul told Timothy, “*Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities*” (I Tim. 5:23). Does such a statement, however, justify social drinking? Does Paul’s statement somehow justify the argument that men can drink a little wine and promise not to get drunk?

When we study I Timothy 5, we find Paul encouraging the drinking of wine, not for social purposes, but for Timothy’s *health problems*. Evidently, he had stomach problems of some sort, and Paul thought drinking some “wine” would help him.

Before we assume that I Timothy 5 is speaking of alcoholic wine, let us remember that “wine” (“oinos”) is a generic term. In his 1st Timothy Commentary, Marshall Patton says grape juice was the drink of Rome and was often mixed with hot or cold water and even spices. Actually, **for sick people like Timothy**, the grape juice had its gluten filtered out, making it

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impossible for it to be fermented.¹⁴ In Rome, they used filtered grape juice like this as a medicine.

Therefore, Paul was telling Timothy to drink grape juice to help his stomach problems. (Patton, Marshall, *Truth Commentaries*, I Timothy, p. 131-132).

I recognize that there are those who would disagree with the above statement and insist that Timothy was drinking alcohol, even in a small portion. Please understand that *even if* it could be proven with certainty that Timothy drank fermented/alcoholic wine, we must respect the context that says he was to “*use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and ... infirmities.*” The word “use” comes from the word “*chraomai*”. This word means, “to furnish what is needed ... “graze” [touch slightly], light upon, etc., that is, (by implication) to employ or (by extension) to act towards one in a given manner: - entreat” (*Strong’s*). In other words, by saying “use a little wine” as opposed to “drink” (potos) wine etc., we see that the implication was this wine was taken as a medicine. Add to this the fact that this was something Paul was essentially commanding him to drink. It was akin to Paul saying, “take your medicine.” It is evident that Timothy didn’t believe he could drink alcohol “casually” or “socially.” He hadn’t drunk any alcohol at all up to this point!

I Timothy 5:23 is not a passage encouraging Timothy to kick back and drink a beer or have a glass of wine with his meal or get a drink after work. This verse does not justify “social drinking” in any way. If anything, this is a verse akin to Proverbs 31:6-7 which states that alcohol had a medicinal use.¹⁵ In a similar manner, there are times when people today use certain medicines that contain alcohol. (This is why certain medicines, including some “OTC” medicines, like NyQuil or Vicks 44, make us sleepy when we take them!) This is for our

¹⁴ See page 24 concerning how filtration could prevent fermentation in grape juice.

¹⁵ See page 40

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benefit and not for “recreational” or “social” use. Mouthwash burns our mouths because it contains alcohol that cleanses the bacteria from our mouths (The mouthwash I use would be considered “44 proof!”). Buying and using a medicine or hygienic product that contains alcohol is not the same as buying alcohol for “recreational” or “social” use.

Therefore, even if we knew with 100% certainty that Paul wanted Timothy to drink alcohol, it is in this context (medicinal) that Paul said it. I Timothy 5:23 is not a passage that justifies the social or recreational drinking of alcohol.

“The Book Of Proverbs Condemns Drunkenness Only.”

In order to prove something from Scripture, one must do more than simply make the claim. What proof is present that allows men to make the claim that only drunkenness is condemned by God in the book of Proverbs? Let us examine three passages in the book that talk about drinking alcohol and learn what God’s thoughts are on this subject.

Proverbs 20:1

This passage says, “*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.*” In this text, we can see that the “wine” under consideration is alcoholic wine. This is because it is compared with “strong drink” in this verse. “Strong drink” is condemned by God, as are “mixed” drinks.¹⁶

Notice that the Lord says whoever is “deceived” into thinking otherwise about wine being a mocker and strong

¹⁶ In Bible times, alcohol was often mixed with other drugs in order to make it more potent.

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drink being raging, is not a wise person! Thus, the argument saying a “little” wine is okay is not a wise thing! Wine and strong drink are harmful to the one consuming them.

Proverbs 23:29-35

Proverbs 23:29-35 is another passage used by many to justify social drinking as people cling to the phrase “*at the last*,” and also focus on the results of drinking (v. 29-30, 33-35). The truth is that in the context of Proverbs 23, God not only condemns drunkenness, but God also forbids drinking in any amount!

Notice that the text says, “*do not look at the wine when it is red*” (v. 31). This is prohibiting our consuming alcohol from the very beginning. He said don’t even look at it! If we do not start drinking, then we do not suffer the consequences of drinking! Thus, this passage is not teaching that it is acceptable to drink alcohol so long as we do not get drunk. This passage says don’t even look at it! Don’t begin the process. Abstinence is effective every time it is tried and this passage is telling us to abstain.

He goes on to say, “*at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder*” (v. 32). Remember, there would be no “*at the last*” if there were not a “*first*”! This is another statement from God telling us not to begin drinking! In this case, it is a warning concerning where drinking leads if we get started. As we study this text, please note the terms “serpent” and “adder” (KJV) are used. These terms are not redundant terms for snakes. Instead, the Holy Spirit had something specific in mind.

What did the Lord have in mind? Herpetologists tell us that the serpent contains venom that is known to be a neurotoxin. In contrast, the adder’s venom is a hemotoxin. In other words, the serpent’s venom affects the nervous system in order to kill its prey while the adder’s venom affects the circulatory system

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of the victim. Pay attention to the comparison the Proverb-writer is making between the snakes and alcohol. He said something that the medical world would not discover for many centuries, and that is that alcohol is a substance which affects the nervous and circulatory systems of the drinker. It affects the nervous system by acting as a depressant. It interacts with brain receptors and interferes with the communication between nerve cells and the nerve pathways by slowing them down. One who drinks can expect impaired judgment, slowed reaction time, and impaired vision. When alcohol impacts the nervous system, moral judgments are impaired. Slurred speech, inability to keep one's balance (staggering when walking, Prov. 23:34), and other problems will surface as more alcohol is consumed. Those who say they need a "drink before bed" actually do themselves more harm than good. Nightmares, restless leg syndrome, and sleep apnea are aggravated by alcohol consumption, not eased or bettered.

The circulatory system as well is affected by alcohol. Blood pressure problems, irregular heartbeat, and similar issues result from drinking alcohol. Of course, the more one drinks, heart problems multiply. In August 2018, CNN reported that alcohol harms us from the very first drink. There is really no "safe" level of alcohol consumption and no amount of alcohol is good for your health.¹⁷

When we put this passage in context, we see that Proverbs 23:29-35 is not a passage justifying alcohol consumption so long as we promise not to get drunk. It is, in fact, warning us of the dangers of consuming alcohol from the very beginning! Alcohol is a drug, a poison, that brings harm in many forms. Let us never forget that.

Proverbs 31:4-5

¹⁷ LaMotte, Sandee. *No Amount Of Alcohol Is Good For Your Overall Health, Global Study Says*.

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This passage says it is not for kings to drink alcohol unless in so doing they forget the law and pervert judgment. Some Bible versions speak of the rights of the people being perverted when a king drinks. This does not sound like God is saying drinking “a little” is okay, does it? God doesn’t want rulers to drink alcohol. He does not want anyone else to drink alcohol, either!

“Ancient People Drank Wine Because Their Water Was Impure.”

While this is not a “Bible” argument, it is a very common argument used to justify drinking alcohol. Perhaps some feel justified in their social drinking when thinking that there might have been people in Bible days drinking alcohol to keep from getting dysentery or other diseases from the impure water they had. Of course, this argument ignores the fact that there were ancient people who had access to wells, springs, fountains, aqueducts, and other sources of water that would have been suitable for drinking (Gen. 24:13, 16; Ex. 15:27; Deut. 8:7; Judg. 7:1, 4-5; Jn. 4:6-12). Next, this argument ignores the fact that we have clean drinking water in this country, and in many other countries! Therefore, even if drinking alcohol was a universal practice due to the impure water (it wasn’t), it is not a needed practice today since we have effective methods for purifying water.

Yes, there were those in ancient times who had water that was unfit to drink. When we consult historical documents, we learn that places like ancient Alexandria, Babylon, Athens, and other places did not have water fit to drink. However, how did they combat this? Were they drinking wine in lieu of water? No, they were not. The ancient citizens of those cities would

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mix some wine into the water so the water was fit to drink. Everett Ferguson wrote, “The ordinary table beverage of the Mediterranean world in Roman times was wine mixed with water...but nearly always the quantity of water predominated.” (“Wine As A Table-Drink In The Ancient World,” *Restoration Quarterly*, 1970, Vol. 13, No.3, p. 141-142). In *Backgrounds Of Early Christianity*, Mr. Ferguson again enlightens us on how people mixed their wine and water by noting, “Average mixtures would have been from two to four parts of water to one part wine.”

In “*Wine-Drinking In New Testament Times*”, Mr. Robert Stein notes that the average ratio of water to wine was three to one. Also, to drink “unmixed wine” (i.e., no water added) was considered a “Scythian” or barbarian custom. In other words, no “polite” member of society would have done this! He notes that even the person who drank equal parts of wine and water was frowned upon, as this was considered “strong drink” (*Christianity Today*, June 20, 1975, p. 9-11).

Thus, while the argument can be made that yes, where there was no pure water, people would mix wine in their water to purify it. This is not, however, the same as drinking alcohol for “recreational” or “social” activities as men try to justify today. This practice was for the health of the people. In fact, I find it interesting that while the people of Bible days would have insisted on “watering down” the wine they drank, today, a “watered down” drink is considered an inferior product. Men today want alcohol in its “full strength,” but the ancient people considered that “barbarian” and socially unacceptable! Our practices are the polar opposite of the practices of the ancients.

Therefore, the practice of those in ancient cultures does not justify social drinking today! We have access to pure drinking water. Their purpose was to purify the drinking water they had.

6.

Questions Concerning Wine In The Bible.

“What About Proverbs 31:6-7? Doesn’t This Passage Allow People To Drink Alcohol?”

Proverbs 31:6-7 must be kept in context with Proverbs 31:1-5. These are the words King Lemuel’s mother told him. Furthermore, Proverbs 31:6-7 is to be contrasted with verses 4-5. It is not for kings and those in authority to drink because they will forget God’s word when intoxicated. In contrast, give a drink to folks who are “*ready to perish.*” In other words, strong drink was given to someone as a painkiller when he was nearing death in Bible days. It would be comparable to morphine, various narcotics, and other painkillers given by our doctors for certain patients in the 21st century when they are ready to die, or when we need to have extreme pain relieved. Today in the U.S., we give strong drugs to folks who are nearing death when we try to make them as comfortable as possible. This is the idea behind Proverbs 31:6-7. “The Jews say that upon this was grounded the practice of

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giving a stupefying drink to condemned prisoners when they were going to execution ...” (*Matthew Henry Commentary*).

Proverbs 31:6-7 is not a contradiction of verses 4-5. Verses 6-7 looks at a completely different set of people for a completely different purpose. Alcohol was used as a medicine in this case. It was used to relieve someone of pain (whether physical or mental anguish) who was nearing death. For example, at the crucifixion, we see Jesus being offered a painkiller (Matt. 27:34; Mk. 15:23). This is similar in application and scope to Lemuel’s words here. Proverbs 31:6-7 does not justify social or recreational drinking.

Luke 10:34 makes a similar point to Proverbs 31:6-7. It speaks of the medicinal use of alcohol. Wine was poured into the man’s cuts to serve as an antiseptic. His injuries needed to be sterilized. Luke, “*the beloved physician*” (Col. 4:14) wrote this, and as a physician, he would have been familiar with the medicinal use of alcohol. Neither the Proverbs nor Luke passages, however, serve as a justification for “social” or recreational drinking.

“Didn’t Noah And Lot Get Drunk?”

Yes, they got drunk. Thus, these men cannot be used as examples of God’s acceptance of social drinking! The context of the passages seems to indicate that these men were passed-out drunk! In both cases, we see harmful and horrible consequences that arose from these actions. With Noah, he was seen naked in his tent, and when he awoke from being drunk, he cursed family members (Gen. 9:24-25). In the case of Lot, his daughters conspired to get him drunk and then committed incest with him (Gen. 19:30-38). Genesis 19:33 and 35 declare he was so drunk that he had no idea when the act was committed!

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These are not passages that are helpful to the position that would justify “social drinking” as being acceptable before God! To the contrary, the conduct of Noah and Lot under the influence of alcohol is a powerful argument for avoiding its use, rather than justifying its use. Look at what alcohol did to these men! These spiritually powerful men did things while drunk that they would have never done while sober!

“Why Did Jesus Talk About Wine And Wineskins?”

To answer this question, we need to study Matthew 9:14-17. When we read the context, we see that Jesus was answering a question posed by the disciples of John. They were wondering why Jesus and His disciples didn’t fast. As Jesus answered this question with the illustration of the people not mourning while the bridegroom is with them. He also spoke of putting a new patch on an old garment and putting new wine into old wineskins (bottles, KJV). The point of Jesus’ illustrations was to show the disciples of John (and everyone else listening) that what He was teaching was unlike anything these folks had ever seen or heard before! Jesus was not “patching up an old garment” when He taught His gospel. His word was not “fixing the Old Testament,” as I have heard some say. Rather, His doctrine, His New Covenant, was something that had not been heard on earth before! This was the point of his illustration in this text.

People unfamiliar with the fermentation process have assumed that putting “new wine,” i.e., grape juice, into a new bottle was intended to accommodate the fermentation process. They suggest a bottle already stretched out (old) couldn’t accommodate fermentation, but a new bottle has the ability to stretch and therefore could accommodate the fermentation

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process. Thus, Jesus said to put new wine in a new wineskin to allow for fermentation. This explanation is wrong.

First, this reasoning is wrong from a physical standpoint because as fermentation takes place, the carbon dioxide that is produced builds exponentially. It is estimated that fermentation produces forty times the volume of carbon dioxide gas to the volume of grape juice!^{18, 19} In other words, if someone intended to create fermented wine and placed the juice in a sealed container, the carbon dioxide produced would burst the container, regardless of whether or not it was “new” or “old”! Fermenting liquids have been known to burst wooden barrels with metal hoops around them!

At the same time, if a container is vented properly so as to release the carbon dioxide, then the juice could easily be placed in whatever wineskin or bottle is available. It does not have to be new. This would ruin the Lord’s illustration because when vented properly, any container would do.

When Jesus was speaking about new wineskins (bottles) for the new wine, what would these people understand? What process was Jesus describing? “New wine was put into new wineskins to keep it from fermenting! To put it in old wineskins with all those dregs of ferment in them would precipitate fermentation in the new wine”.¹⁹ New skins, fresh from the tannery, that held unfermented grape juice actually kept the juice from fermenting since it did not contain the sugars, glutens, and other precipitates that might begin fermentation.²⁰ It is for *this reason* that Jesus said putting new wine in a new wineskin (bottle) would “preserve” both (Matt.

¹⁸ From the University of Washington, D.E.O.H.S. “Health and Safety Practices For Wineries”

<https://depts.washington.edu/wineryhs/Fermentation.html>

¹⁹ McGuiggan, Jim, *The Bible, The Saint, and the Alcohol Industry*, p. 113-114.

²⁰ *ibid.* p. 174

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9:17). Keeping the new wine in the new wineskin would prevent fermentation and thus prevent it from bursting.

Please understand, this is not to say that people could not use new wineskins (bottles) to ferment grape juice and produce alcoholic wine. No doubt those who made wine would need new wineskins to replace the old ones from time to time. The point being made here is that putting new wine in new wineskins (or bottles) would have been necessary to keep the juice from fermenting *if this was the desire*. New wine (fresh juice) kept in a new bottle would not begin fermenting, and therefore, the bottle and juice would be “*preserved*” (Matt. 9:17). When we respect the context, we see that Matthew 9:14-17 is not a passage justifying drinking alcohol in any amount. Jesus was not teaching people how to make alcohol. Christ’s point was to tell the people that His gospel was bringing something new to the earth. It is something that has not been seen or heard on earth before, not merely putting a new patch on an old garment, or putting new wine in an old wineskin.

“What About Passages Like Psalm 104:15, Job 32:19, And The Like?”

Psalm 104:15 says, “*And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.*” I hope it has become clear through this study that just because the English word “wine” is used in a Bible text, it does not mean it is an intoxicating drink. “Wine” is a general term, and thus we are wrong to assume it means an alcoholic drink when we read “wine” in the Bible in a passage like Psalm 104:15. When we read the rest of the psalm, we see that there is nothing in this context to suggest it is alcohol.

In Job 32:19, Elihu said, “*Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles.*” This may

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seem like a reference to fermented wine at first. Yet, it is nothing of the sort. When we read the full context (v. 1-19), we see that Elihu, an acquaintance of Job, wishes to speak about Job's condition and why he is suffering. This is not justification for drinking wine, nor was Elihu drinking wine. In simple terms, he was making a speech saying that he has waited patiently for the older men to speak (v. 7). However, their answers did not suit him (v. 9). So, (in our vernacular) he was "bursting" to say something and finally getting his chance to do it. This had nothing to do with literal alcohol, drinking alcohol, or saying that drinking was accepted by God. It was just an illustration of his wishing to speak and not being able to until now.²¹

“Doesn't A Christian Have The Liberty To Drink Alcohol Because Of What Paul Said In Romans 14:21?”

Romans 14-15 describe the liberties Christians have and how the strong brother needs to “receive” and bear with the weak (Rom. 14:1, 15:1). Paul wrote to the Romans and said, “*It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak*” (Rom. 14:21). Was Paul saying that Christians have the liberty to drink alcohol at times?

First, let us remember that this word “wine” is a general term (oinos). It is not right to assume that this word means an alcoholic beverage. If it is an alcoholic beverage, the context will reveal it. In Romans 14-15, Paul is talking about matters that are lawful to do. Hopefully, at this point in our study, we understand that drinking alcohol in a “social” or “recreational”

²¹ This passage also helps to reinforce the point we made from Matthew 9:14-17. When someone wished to make alcoholic wine, even a “new bottle” with no vent would burst!

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sense is a sin (Eph. 5:18; I Pet. 4:3-4; etc.). Christians do not have the liberty to engage in anything that is sin (I Thess. 5:21-22; I Pet. 2:11). Therefore, whatever a strong Christian has the liberty to do and the weak brother has the liberty to forego in Romans 14-15, must first be lawful. Let us examine the context and see what we can learn. In Romans 14, we see ...

- The strong brother is not to “*despise*” the weak and the weak brother is not to “*judge*” the strong (v. 3).
- The strong and weak “*stand*” before God in their decisions (v. 4).
- The strong and weak need to be “*fully persuaded*” in what they do (v. 5).
- The strong and weak are doing what they do “*to the Lord*” (v. 6).
- Whether the strong act or the weak abstain, the act is not “*unclean of itself*” (v. 14).
- Paul said the things done by the strong and weak are “*pure*” (v. 20).

It is in this context that Paul says, “*It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak*” (Rom. 14:21). If someone insists that this “*wine*” is intoxicating, then remember Paul said the “*strong*” brother ought not to do it if it is going to offend his weak brother!²² In other words, Romans 14:21 does nothing to prove or allow the “*social*” drinking of alcohol because this passage is telling folks to stop if by partaking it entices another to sin!

When we examine the text closely, we see that to eat meat or not eat meat was inconsequential to God. There was nothing inherently righteous or sinful in the meat. Does it not logically follow then that there would be nothing inherently good or bad in the “*wine*” that was mentioned in Romans 14:21? In this

²² Strong’s and Thayer’s Lexicons define this term as “to entice to sin”.

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text, it didn't matter to God whether or not one drank or didn't drink. Now, knowing what we know about alcoholic wine, and in light of the passages we have studied in chapter four,²³ can we honestly say that there is nothing inherently wrong with alcohol? There is nothing in this verse that demands that we interpret this word as being an alcoholic drink.

“What About Deuteronomy 14:26? Doesn't This Verse Say That Drinking Alcohol Is Okay?”

In Deuteronomy 14:26, we read, “*And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household.*” On the surface, one might think this is a passage authorizing an Israelite to drink alcohol. Yet, does it not seem odd that when the entire Bible has been consistent in condemning strong drink²⁴, that we find a verse in Scripture that contradicts this teaching?

As we ponder the question above, let us remember that Deuteronomy 14:26, like all other verses in the Bible, has a context. Reading one verse alone does not allow us to understand the context in which this statement was made. What is the context of Deuteronomy 14? This chapter is set within a book that was a written record of Moses' final speeches before the people entered Canaan. This was a “second reading” to remind the Israelites of certain truths before they entered Canaan under Joshua's leadership (Num. 27:16-23). Chapter fourteen reminds the people that they are

²³ Proverbs 20:1, 23:29-35, 31:4-5; I Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:18; I Peter 4:3-4 (See chapter 4)

²⁴ For more study, see p. 18-20

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special to God (14:2). They were so special that God wanted them to act in a different way than the world (14:1-2). He wanted them to eat differently than the world (14:3-21). He wanted them to worship differently than the world (14:22-29)! Yes, the verse that speaks about strong drink and wine, etc., was set in the context of telling God's people they are different from all others! Therefore, would God say they were to be different from the world but then encourage the Israelites to get intoxicated like the world? That would contradict numerous Old and New Testament Scriptures.²⁵

A few things we need to remember as we study this text. First, remember that God's word does not contradict itself. If God has told people to avoid drinking alcohol in a "social" or "recreational" sense (and He has) then this passage will not contradict that teaching. Second, remember from earlier studies that the word original word for "wine" and "strong drink" are general terms and do not necessarily imply alcoholic drinks unless the context demands this understanding.²⁶ Third, notice that in this text, whatever was being done was being done by people who were to strive to please God in worship. God would later establish the place of worship (Jerusalem, II Chron. 6:6). As we know, it was not always convenient (because of the distance traveled) to bring all things necessary for worship. God, therefore allowed men to buy what is necessary when they get there.

Thus, the point in Deuteronomy 14:26 is not to justify a man's selfish desires, nor to drink intoxicating drinks, but telling the Jews that once the place is established for the Lord's worship in Canaan, you may need to buy those things necessary to accomplish the worship to God. When we study carefully, we will see that the items listed in that verse were all items necessary for worship to the God of Heaven. There were

²⁵ e.g., Ezra 10:11; Prov. 9:6; Isa. 52:11; II Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4

²⁶ For more study, see chapters 1-2.

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animals sacrificed in worship to God (Lev. 1:2, 5:15-16; etc.) and drink offerings poured out in worship to God (Gen. 35:14; Num. 15:4-5, 10). Yes, at times, there were even some sacrifices that were eaten by the people (Ex. 12:11). At no time, though, do we read of God condoning man drinking intoxicating drinks.

When we respect the context of this passage, we see that it is consistent with the rest of the Bible Deuteronomy 24:16 is not a passage that condones “recreational” or “social” drinking of alcohol. It was talking about what a Jewish person might need to purchase when he worshipped God.

Conclusion

What if someone were to say, “A wise and good thing to do is to start drinking alcohol.”? Would you defend this statement? Would you say that this is something that ought to be encouraged? What about encouraging our children to drink alcohol? Since “other people” do it, is it okay then? Can we justify drinking for “health” reasons? As of August 2018, even some in the scientific community are now saying that no amount of alcohol is safe for one’s overall health!²⁷

Until someone is willing to defend the statement that says, “A wise and good thing to do is to start drinking alcohol,” there is nothing else to say. Arguing on “technicalities”, what is legal in a country, what certain cultures do or do not do is irrelevant. Would you say it is wise and good to drink alcohol? Would you advise children to drink alcohol? If you would so, please do not give any advice to my children.

We know it is a wise and good thing to be educated. We would agree it is a wise and good thing to believe in God, to be a morally upright person, to be a productive member of society, etc. We encourage and teach our children in these ways so that when they are adults, they will live this kind of life and then teach it to their children. However, God says that it is *not* wise to drink alcohol (Prov. 20:1). What will we say when asked about drinking alcohol?

²⁷ LaMotte, Sandee. *No Amount Of Alcohol Is Good For Your Overall Health, Global Study Says*

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God doesn't want us to drink alcohol in a "social" or "recreational" way. Instead, He wants us to be sober-minded (I Pet. 5:8; I Thess. 5:6-8). Being sober-minded is not possible with alcohol in our bodies. It is my hope that this study will help people understand what the Bible says about drinking. This is not an "exhaustive" study, but I hope this provides our readers with the tools needed to combat this argument that says that "social" or "recreational" drinking has God's approval. It does not!

If you are a Christian (Mk. 16:16; Acts 11:26), then you no longer live according to the flesh (I Pet. 4:2; Rom. 8:6). Living according to the spirit means we will not use our bodies in ways that God condemns. Our bodies belong to God (I Cor. 6:20). This includes the fact that we will not act like the world and drink alcohol (Eph. 5:18; I Pet. 4:3-4). Let us make sure we listen to the Lord and act as He wants us to act.

Is it a wise and good thing to drink alcohol? God says, "No!" and now some in the scientific community have caught up with God's answer. How will you respond?

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Appendix

Albert Barnes' Comments on John 2:10 and "Good Wine".

The good wine - This shows that this had all the qualities of real wine. We should not be deceived by the phrase "good wine." We often use the phrase to denote that it is good in proportion to its strength and its power to intoxicate; but no such sense is to be attached to the word here. Pliny, Plutarch, and Horace describe wine as "good," or mention that as "the best wine," which was harmless or "innocent" - poculo vini "innocentis." The most useful wine - "utilissimum vinum" - was that which had little strength; and the most wholesome wine - "saluberrimum vinum" - was that which had not been adulterated by "the addition of anything to the 'must' or juice." Pliny expressly says that a good wine was one that was destitute of spirit (lib. iv. c. 13). It should not be assumed, therefore, that the "good wine" was "stronger" than the other: it is rather to be presumed that it was milder.

The wine referred to here was doubtless such as was commonly drunk in Palestine. That was the pure juice of the grape. It was not brandied wine, nor drugged wine, nor wine compounded of various substances, such as we drink in this land. The common wine drunk in Palestine was that which was the simple juice of the grape. we use the word "wine" now to denote the kind of liquid which passes under that name in this country - always containing a considerable portion of alcohol not only the alcohol produced by fermentation, but alcohol "added" to keep it or make it stronger. But we have no right to take that sense of the word, and go with it to the interpretation of the Scriptures. We should endeavor to place ourselves in the

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exact circumstances of those times, ascertain precisely what idea the word would convey to those who used it then, and apply that sense to the word in the interpretation of the Bible; and there is not the slightest evidence that the word so used would have conveyed any idea but that of the pure juice of the grape, nor the slightest circumstance mentioned in this account that would not be fully met by such a supposition.

No man should adduce this instance in favor of drinking wine unless he can prove that the wine made in the waterpots of Cana was just like the wine which he proposes to drink. The Saviour's example may be always pleaded just as it was; but it is a matter of obvious and simple justice that we should find out exactly what the example was before we plead it. There is, moreover, no evidence that any other part of the water was converted into wine than that which was "drawn out" of the water-casks for the use of the guests. On this supposition, certainly, all the circumstances of the case are met, and the miracle would be more striking. All that was needed was to furnish a "supply" when the wine that had been prepared was nearly exhausted. The object was not to furnish a large quantity for future use. The miracle, too, would in this way be more apparent and impressive. On this supposition, the casks would appear to be filled with water only; as it was drawn out, it was pure wine. Who could doubt, then, that there was the exertion of miraculous power? All, therefore, that has been said about the Redeemer's furnishing a large quantity of wine for the newly-married pair, and about his benevolence in doing it, is wholly gratuitous. There is no evidence of it whatever; and it is not necessary to suppose it in order to an explanation of the circumstances of the case.

(From *Barnes' Notes on John*, pub. Baker's Book House)

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